

AVONDALE
OF
AVONDALE





Frederick Silver.



AVONDALE

OF

AVONDALE.

A POLITICAL ROMANCE.

IN THREE VOLS.

BY

UTTERE BARRE.

I have a lever, had I fulcrum too,
The earth from dullest sloth should be uplift.

VOL. III.

London:

REMINGTON AND CO.,

5, ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1877.

BOOK V.



FLORENCE VRYNNE.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

FLORENCE VRYNNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE proceedings of the Waterbridge commission had indeed been, as Wyversley said, attracting attention. Mr. Irving, Captain Wright, Mr. Radford, and Mr. Benton had entered with the greatest gusto into the necessary preliminary arrangements for making the exposure complete and damning. Messrs. Rosse and Taylor had never prepared a case for counsel more carefully than they now worked up the evidence.

The Commissioners showed themselves well up to their work. They spared none, gentle or simple. They probed to the core the moral plague-spots of the town. Day after day the investigation went on, and men grew absolutely terrified at the corruption laid bare, at the mass of pollution heaped up, dreading how far the con-

tamination might have spread among other towns. It seemed impossible to credit that any section of the English people could have sunk into such a depth of degradation. Voters confessed, and almost gloried in, selling their votes at every election that had come off during their memory, this time to a Tory, next to a Radical, the time after to both. Indeed, this latter was the favourite mode of procedure. Personification, too, was a common and openly recognised ruse ; and vote early, vote often, was carried out as far as practicable. Common honesty had left them ; the voice of conscience never spoke ; there was no regard for the sentiments on which depends the very existence of society ; “ *perfidia plus quam Punica, nihil veri, nihil sancti, nullus Deum metus, nullum jus jurandum, nulla religio.* ”

But, while all the world marvelled, the inhabitants of Waterbridge made light of the matter, and pursued their avocations with accustomed serenity. They amused themselves with nicknaming the Commissioners, “ The World, the Flesh, and the Devil.” The President, Coste, an urbane and dignified Q.C., who had

much difficulty in restraining within due bounds the exuberant feelings of the third member of the trio, was "the World." "The Flesh" was Warmfield, the youngest of them; a man somewhat nice in dress, who was never without a flower in his buttonhole, which he now and again applied to his nose, as if the very atmosphere were reeking with material, as it was with moral, filth and abominations.

Grim Growler was "the Devil," and the epithet was not unaptly applied. Him alone of the three the witnesses dreaded. Woe betided the unfortunate individual whom Mr. Growler suspected of prevarication.

Vain the assertions that every fact had been made known; vain a reference to their oath—

"You have been acknowledging a whole heap of lies, you have been pleading guilty to years of knavery and cheating," was thundered out, "would you persuade us that any oath now would bind you, or anything less than the fear of a prosecution for perjury? The truth, the whole truth, you—you—"

"Gently, Mr. Growler," the President would

interpose; "the truth, sir, if you please, and consider carefully your position;" while Grim Growler would conclude his sentence in an under tone, "you damned scoundrel! the whole pack of you ought to be pitched into the mud of your own pestiferous stream."

Vain were protestations of innocence—"Have you ever voted at an election? Then that is presumption against you. Have you ever sat on a committee? Then that is scarcely less than positive proof." Vain were appeals for mercy—"We have nothing to do with mercy, that is a matter for the Attorney-General's consideration. We have only to find out who are the most thorough scamps, and the most unmitigated villains in Waterbridge—and it is rather a difficult duty;" and then, in a whisper to his junior colleague—"Why, Warmfield, if the devil himself were to send here a dozen of his choicest imps, they would appear angels of purity beside these reprobates."

Vain was it for any to stand upon professional privileges. "No profession ever yet threw its protecting mantle over duplicity and fraud;"

and, when two such gentlemen refused to answer they were, despite the objections raised by a Sergeant-at-Law and two juniors, whom they had telegraphed for to defend them, hurried off for two months to the county gaol, the sentence being afterwards affirmed by the full Court of Queen's Bench.

Mr. Growler doubtless overstepped the liberty of examination allowed him, and occasionally permitted his righteous indignation to overpower him, and to convert him from a judge into an inquisitor. But we may fairly pardon him, just as we pardon the skilful surgeon, though his handling may not be as delicate as that of the humbug, the fine ladies' medical attendant, when he has excised the cancer, or the ulcer, that was eating into our vitals. It is doubtful if any man less resolute, less determined, less harsh, would have been a match for the practised bribers and bribees of Waterbridge. Twice had committees of the House of Commons heard petitions in respect of its elections, but on neither occasion could they report "any circumstances calling for the special and active interference of the House."

Even the Committee in the preceding August, though they had discovered the existence of bribery, had not the faintest idea of the nature of the revelations that were now made.

Needless to detail minutely the evidence—how, not alone Mr. Broadcloth, but also Mr. Tartwine, the ropemaker, Mr. Crockery, the earthenware man, Mr. Quinine, the chemist, Messrs. Shovell and Tongs, the ironmongers, Mr. Bridles, the saddler, Messrs. Gigge and Clarence, the carriage builders, and many others, saved up their unpaid accounts from one election to another, adding thereto any items that might—or might not—have been forgotten in the hurry of making them out before. How, like Mr. Figgs, Mr. Candy, the confectioner, and Mr. Dolly, the toyman, found sovereigns in out-of-the-way corners; and, like Mr. Fleshman, Mr. Oatmeal, the miller, sold to Mr. What's-his-name, flour at 70s. a quarter, while his partner, Mr. Barleycake, the baker, bought it of him again at 25s. a sack—how, once, when no contest could be otherwise got up, Skinner, the Radical lawyer, Grabmuny, the Tory one (they were not partners then), and

Cheatem Bothe, the Liberal ditto, guaranteed the expenses of Sir Timothy Sykes, the London Alderman, and subscribed £500 each for that purpose, and afterwards let the Alderman in for £6,000, besides clearing nearly the same sum out of the other two candidates—how the canvassers pocketed half the money given them by the agents to carry on their special work, the agents diddled the solicitors, and these latter hocused their accounts to make them presentable to their clients, and how no one canvasser, agent, solicitor, ever returned a farthing that once came into their fingers—how Percy Mulgrave bitterly complained of the cruel treatment he had experienced from those into whose hands he had fallen, and that his disbursements, instead of being as promised, under £2,000, had come up to £6,000 (which sum, by the by, being £4,000 more than his wife had allowed, would compel him to live for the next two years on a very scant allowance of pocket money to make up the deficiency)—how Starrett, when at length driven into a corner after much fighting, confessed that he had known at least £20,000 illegally spent on different occa-

sions ; that he did not believe any election within the last half century had been pure ; that the electors generally, and the attorneys in particular, were sharper rogues, and more experienced at their work than even he had imagined, and had now diddled him out of £5,000 above what he had intended to spend.

One solitary circumstance may be noted. The day on which Avondale arrived, Sandy Mac Swindle had made a full disclosure. On an earlier day, when before the Commissioners, he had so fenced and equivocated that they had dismissed him. They now gave him a last opportunity of obtaining a certificate ; and he, following the example set by his superiors, disburdened his conscience in such a way as not only to put the final touches to the hideous spectre of wickedness that had already been carved out, but also to compromise our hero. He declared that he had called on Mr. Avondale on the occasion of his second visit to Waterbridge, that Mr. Avondale, knowing his influence among the lowest class, had asked his assistance in secret and apart from his own committee ; that they would have come to an arrange-

ment had not the sum of £1,000 which he asked, been too much, and that Mr. Avondale offered him £500, and finally getting angry because he would not take less than £1,000, had threatened to kick him out of the room.

The tale was true in part. The landlord confirmed the visit, and the hearing of angry words. Mr. Taylor, too, could not deny this, for he entered the hotel as MacSwindle was leaving, and blamed Avondale for giving him an interview at all. Taylor questioned him closely, but he adhered to the declaration, and the lawyer could only hope that Avondale would be able to meet the charge. When Avondale appeared next morning he asked the Commissioners to call Mac Swindle, and re-examine him—his statement did not vary. Mulgrave was present. To him Avondale turned—

“Do you, Mr. Mulgrave, who have had some experience of this fellow, believe his story?”

“Not a word of it, sir, if you deny it.”

“Thank you, very much. Such an expression of opinion from you would suffice to clear me in the eyes of honest men. Mr. President, will

you kindly call Henry Anson, before I give evidence?"

Taylor gave Avondale a look which told him he could guess what was coming, and MacSwindle shifted uneasily. Anson was waiter at the "Royal George."

"I don't know what we are to ask you, Anson—can you throw any light on this?" said Mr. Coste.

"Yes, sir. I went up to Mr. Avondale, and told him that MacSwindle wanted to see him. Mr. Avondale would not see him at first, but after a minute he asked me if there were any other way, besides through the sitting room, into the next room. As luck would have it there is, sir—through the dressing room. So Mr. Avondale told me to send up MacSwindle, who had asked very particularly if any one was with Mr. Avondale, and to go up myself into the bedroom and hear what he had to say. I was not many moments getting there, and 'twas Mac Swindle who, after beating about the bush, wanted Mr. Avondale to engage him for £1,000 to look after the poorer voters. Mr. Avondale directed him

to speak to Mr. Rosse about it; and then he lowered his terms, and offered to do it for £500, and £100 for himself. And he went on that Mr. Rosse and Mr. Taylor did not know anything about elections, and would lose Mr. Avondale the place, when the gentleman jumped up and threatened to kick him down stairs. That's the whole of the matter, as true as I am standing here, your Honour. But I forgot," added the witness, with a merry twinkle of the eye, "that MacSwindle gave his opinions pretty free about some of the gentlemen. Would it be proper for me to repeat it?"

"Of course it would," replied Grim Growler—"go on, sir."

"He said that Skinner and Grabmuny were rogues, regular out and outers, and were nicely plundering Mr. Mulgrave, who was a good sort of man, but a little bit weak in the upper stories."

Roars of laughter, at Mulgrave's expense, interrupted the witness; when they had subsided, the President directed him to continue.

"He said Mr. Mulgrave's working committee were all a pack of scamps, and were in co. with

Skinner and Grabmuny to get all the tin they could out of him—”

“Stop,” exclaimed Grim Growler, “this private opinion of Mr. MacSwindle is invaluable. I must read it to the committee.” He did so slowly and with great emphasis, and, the court being crowded to hear Avondale’s examination, most of them were present. “And Mr. MacSwindle said the committee were scamps. Well, he certainly ought to know. Did he mention any names in particular?”

“No, sir—that is only one or two. He said Mr. Crockery would sell his soul for a sovereign, that the Town Council always heaped theirs together, and put them up for a lump sum, and that Mr. Figgs never had no soul at all—only a pound weight three ounces short. He considered Oatmeal and Barleycake uncommon slippery—you could never be sure of ’em if you did not see them up to the poll booth, just as you ain’t sure of getting good wheat flour from ’em if you don’t go into the mill and stand by the hopper and watch that they don’t put peas or beans in; and old Dr. Smiler Humbug were just as uncertain—

he might vote if you didn't pay him beforehand, just like his old mare hobbles on, shying every yard or two, when she is hungry, but as soon as he fingers the coppers he pulls short up, and, perhaps, turns back, like the mare does when she's had a meal, if some other bait isn't held afore his nose to tempt him on."

Loud laughter stopped the witness for two or three minutes; and the unfortunate personages thus particularised, who happened to be amongst the listeners, muttered imprecations deep, if not loud, on Anson's garrulousness. He took breath, bestowed a condescending nod on Starrett, and continued—

"MacSwindle thought that Mr. Starrett must be a great deal softer than Mr. Mulgrave, for putting up here when he knew the people so well, and especially for employing Cheatem Bothe as his lawyer. Mr. Starrett is a cute customer, and have been long engaged in the bribery line, and still longer in the butter business, which they says wants just as good wits as 'tother trade; but he couldn't miss being took in by Cheatem Bothe, and had no

chance of coming round him at all, for only one could do that, and he was old Harry himself—they was MacSwindle's exact words, your Honours."

Mr. Coste had hitherto maintained his dignity pretty well, but the rich tone of humour with which the witness spoke, and the malicious twinkle in his eyes, combined with Starrett's crestfallen appearance and Cheatem Bothe's assumption of anger, completely upset his gravity. Silence being at length restored, he observed—

"I hope, Anson, you are speaking the literal truth—remember you are on your oath."

"Yes, sir, and I kissed the book, too. MacSwindle said that Mr. Thompson, the brewer, when he were going to tell a lie never kissed the book, and so saved his conscience; but that Mr. Broadcloth wern't up to the dodge, and so had to get absolution at next Sunday's love-feast from the Methodist parson, though the parson wouldn't give absolution till he had had a good dinner at Mr. Broadcloth's first. And that Mr. Chairman is all save"—as he caught sight of Everett,

the defeated Conservative candidate — “that MacSwindle begged Mr. Avondale wouldn’t send any bad money going, like Mr. Everett did at last election, when the man came down ’spress from London from the big solicitors, who wrote Mr. Everett’s address for him, ’cause he hadn’t brains to do it himself, and brought a thousand bran-new Queen’s likenesses for distribution, but half of them were counterfeits. MacSwindle said this were too bad, for a man when he is dead drunk must trust to your fair play, and can’t tell whether you are fobbing him off with a bit of brass or a real shiner, and I agree it were a nasty trick, your Honours, and most people think the same. Our motto is—‘act on the square, and don’t deceive your neighbour in that way, and when you lies or cheats do it honourable;’ because, sir, that is straightforward. Nobody at Waterbridge believes anybody else, but for a gentleman like Mr. Everett to buy a poor man’s soul for a bad Victoria, is that mean as nobody would do but a ’lection attorney, who hadn’t seen the bottom of a pint cup or the inside of a round of beef for the last twelvemonths.”

“Are these statements correct, Mr. Avondale?” asked the President.

“I believe so, sir. I have forgotten most of MacSwindle’s conversation, but I know that I talked with him for some time in order to acquire a little knowledge of the character of some of the persons with whom I was likely to come into contact, and that his descriptions greatly amused me.”

Avondale’s examination lasted some two hours. The Commission were predisposed towards him, and, at the close, congratulated him on the way in which he had conducted himself. They then said that they had finished their labours at Waterbridge, and would be prepared next morning to grant certificates to such persons as, in their opinion, deserved them.

Mulgrave and Taylor dined with Avondale. The former, poor man, was thoroughly disgusted with the conduct of his agents. He felt acutely the degradation the election had brought upon himself, and was much gratified to hear the favourable opinion put forth by FitzHenry. Taylor left early, and Mulgrave and Avondale

spent the evening together. The conversation passed from subject to subject, and Avondale discovered that his companion possessed a much wider acquaintance with things generally than he had hitherto given him credit for. He was a scholar—he had graduated high at Oxford—he was well-read in history and literature; he had a cultivated taste for poetry and art; he was versed in the less abstruse problems of metaphysics and ontology; he had a considerable acquaintance with social theories; in a word, he was an educated gentleman. Whether he was a statesman, was altogether a different matter. They parted with mutual expressions of good will.

“I trust you will soon be in the House, Mr. Avondale. Our views, though somewhat discordant, are not directly opposed, and it may easily be that time’s wheel will bring us together under, if not in, the same Government. You have started well, very well. Your defeat here will be the gain of a loss. You have, I understand, good friends. I wish you success; and I hope that the acquaintance we have thus com-

menced will not be broken off, and I shall have the pleasure of seeing you in town, and of introducing you to my wife."

Next morning Mr. Broadcloth's certificate and those of five others were refused, on the ground that they had not made a full disclosure. In Broadcloth's case the refusal was somewhat harsh, and was due entirely to Grim Growler's persistency. The unfortunate bill which he had presented to Avondale was the cause. This had predisposed the Commission against him ; then he had tried to explain it away, and, getting confused, appeared to be prevaricating; and, finally, he attempted to shield some of the persons concerned in the last election. The lawyers also received their certificates, to the intense chagrin of Grim Growler, who could not, however, allege any reason, valid in law, for withholding them. The lawyers had foreseen the coming storm, and had, therefore, secured themselves against it, by making a clean breast of all the transactions. Grabmuny was the only one who hesitated, and was, in consequence, told to sit down ; but next day, having seen meanwhile how Cheatem

Bothe comported himself, he humbly submitted to the Commissioners that he had refreshed his memory and that he could, therefore, now distinctly recollect many occurrences which, twenty-four hours earlier, had utterly passed from his mind.

This ceremony over, Mr. Coste tendered, in the name of himself and colleagues, his most sincere thanks to Messrs. Rosse and Taylor for the very great assistance they had afforded, saying, also, that they were under scarcely less obligation to Mr. Avondale's committee, not one of whom had been shown to have been in any way connected with the corrupt practices. He spoke in highest terms of Avondale's conduct throughout the election, but upon the other three candidates he made no remark, leaving them to chew the cud of their own reflections.

We may as well here slightly anticipate events. On the opening of the next Hilary term, an application was made, as FitzHenry had expected, to the Queen's Bench to grant the certificate the Commissioners had refused Mr. Broadcloth; and what he did not expect, he was selected to make

that application. It is needless to say that he, nevertheless, discharged his duty to the best of his ability, and as the statute under which the Commission was appointed was somewhat ambiguous, and it might be fairly construed as giving them less discretion than they had assumed in the refusing of certificates, he gained his point. Following on this decision came the elevation of Mr. Percy Mulgrave to the peerage, under the style of Baron Kilcoe, a title taken from a small hill in county Cork, overlooking Roaring Water Bay, near which he had inherited, in right of his mother, a few acres of barren land. His wife, anxious to exchange her pinchbeck title for a genuine one, had schemed and plotted to effect her purposes. She exercised great influence over her own set, and the Government could not afford to lose that influence by compelling Mulgrave to resign; neither could they first open Parliament without a Secretary for Ireland present at it. They, therefore, fortifying themselves with the opinions as to Mulgrave's conduct, expressed both by the Commissioners and by the Court of Queen's Bench, and reiterated by FitzHenry him-

self in his application, pitchforked him into the House of Lords.

Avondale remained at Waterbridge a day or two. He called on his chief supporters to return them his thanks for their aid. They were pleased to see him, and got up an impromptu dinner in his honour before he left. His health, proposed by Mr. Radford in a speech of wonderful length, was drunk with great applause. Radford expressed himself well satisfied with the revelations which the Commission had elicited, though he was utterly ashamed of the morality of some of his fellow townsmen. It, however, afforded him some consolation to know, that a very respectable minority of the voters had kept their hands from the contamination of illgotten gain, and that the Commission had even addressed a few words of approval and commendation to their particular party. Avondale, in responding, deplored the corrupt state of the borough, but he reminded those present that though it had fairly carried off the palm of wickedness, yet it had many competitors who ran it close in the race. Other towns could easily be pointed out where an investiga-

tion as rigorous and unsparing would lead to disclosures equally degrading; and he trusted the day was not far distant when, if people could not be educated to the point of refusing, they should be deterred from accepting a bribe; when the law could draw no distinction between the payment of money to influence a man's vote and the payment of money to tempt him to commit a felony; when the being in any way concerned in corrupt practices should stamp a man, if not for life at least for years, with infamy and blot his name from the roll of citizens. Mr. Rosse, Captain Wright, Irving, and others, spoke; and although not exactly charmed with the scrutiny, they did not pretend to regret its results.

Before they separated they called in Henry Anson, congratulated him on the excellent way in which he had rendered MacSwindle's descriptions, and drank long life to him.

And now, dear Waterbridge, adieu. Sink back to thy obscurity in the marshes; settle down amidst thy dirt and slime, thy mire and filth; hug to thy breast the notoriety thou hast gained;

and pray that when the last trump shall sound, it may wake thee and thine, still placidly slumbering 'neath a thick layer of mud. Dear Waterbridge, good bye.

CHAPTER II.

AVONDALE had before him two months of comparative leisure. Till the beginning of the New Year little could be done in the way of organising or even getting together a party; so far he had proceeded well; he must be content to let events take care of themselves till after the Christmas festivities. But at no time could he remain absolutely idle, he was nervously eager for occupation; his mind if employed upon nothing else would feed upon itself. And now, less than ever, was it possible for him to rest while the hours and days crept by.

Love—passion rather—for Clare Champion devoured him; he was compelled to find labour of some kind, if only to prevent his thoughts ever recurring to her. Often was the madness strong upon him; often was he at the point of commencing a correspondence with her; often did the longing, almost irresistible, seize him of rushing

to her and begging her to flee with him. Fortunate, most fortunate was it, for him, for both, that he was not like Wyversley, a man of ample wealth and unfettered with relations; or there would have been a scandal—a divorce—a couple hidden midst the Italian lakes or in the Grecian Archipelago, loving wildly for months, probably hating afterwards for a lifetime—the fair tablet on which was lightly traced the career of one of them blurred, blotted, fractured, so that no toil, no genius, might be able to restore its pristine beauty.

His time he filled up as best he could with literary work. He began a poem, a novel, a drama all at once. With these he mingled a heterogeneous mass of historical reading, &c., though he did—that is he completed—nothing, but the occupation relieved his mind, and by degrees the torrent of excitement calmed down.

One good effect his acquaintance with Lady Campion had produced, though perhaps most will think such a benefit purchased too dearly—it had completely changed the current of his feelings with regard to Miss Dawson. He had heard, just

before leaving Egremond, with little emotion though with not a little soreness, of her impending marriage with Killarney; he heard, with even less feeling, about a fortnight after returning to town from Waterbridge, that the marriage would be, owing to the state of her health, put off till the next summer, and that she would spend the three winter months in the South of France. He was somewhat surprised, because she had a strong constitution, without the slightest tendency to consumption or chest complaints.

The time, however, though it might occasionally lag, did not hang heavily on his hands. The members of both sides of the house were taking sweet counsel with their constituents. Wonderful, according to these gentlemen, had been their own doings during the past session. No matter to which party they belonged, Conservative or Liberal, Tory or Radical, they had invariably supported the good measures and opposed the bad ones, and their exertions had been just as invariably successful. It was occasionally rather amusing, when the same borough had re-

turned an element from each end of the social battery, to see how the two opposing poles would at the annual banquet unite and give forth the same spark—to see how in the Town Hall of Kakodyle, that watering-place so famed for the sweet odour arising from its sulphur springs, the Honourable Grosvenor de la Terriere, who owned the land on which the spa was situated, and Alderman Spinks, locally known as Glasshouse Joe, who made the bottles in which the water was exported, would reciprocate and coo like gentle doves, and assure the audience that though they might differ on such minor points as the need of a National Church or an Upper House, of an Army or a Navy, their sentiments were at bottom not diverse.

The proceedings of some members of the Cabinet afforded not a little ground for animadversion. Bayndon had taken Exmoor's post, and had informed the people of Grantham that nobody before him had been qualified to manage such a department as the Navy, that he should be able to cut down the expenses one half (loud cheers), to get rid of one-third of the clerks (faint cheers),

who were all connected with the bloated aristocracy (vociferous cheers), and to shut up two of the dockyards, and to discharge the hands—very faint cheers, which finally degenerated into a growl of disapprobation, and a trades-unionist present gave vent to the general feeling by proposing, amidst yells of applause, that instead of closing any of the yards, the Government should open others, and build plenty of ships, which would be wanted at some future time, if not now, and if never wanted it would be all the same—the lazy nobs and swells who were enriched by the labour and blood of the poor, could very well spare some of the earnings, to which they had properly no right, in order to help the poor when trade was so bad.

Bayndon might be pardoned his eccentricities—he knew no better, he was fresh to his work, had only just got into decent society, and had been taken on solely because of his lavish promises of retrenchment. If he had boasted so frightfully before his elevation, it was not likely that he could undergo any wonderful transformation when only that had occurred.

But the eccentricities of Blocke Head and Sloe were inexcusable. The former, however, poor man, was a mistake—that is the best method of describing him. He might have done “monstrous well” as steward of some big house where the servants were old retainers, and where he would never have been called upon for an explanation of any of his arrangements, or as head master of a free school, where the boys were not troublesome, or even as chief clerk in a department, the only business of which was to copy letters and docket receipts—provided that is the subordinate clerks were mild and modest, and the principals unexact and considerate, and the letters needed no deciphering and the receipts came in due order and, and, nothing ever occurred to upset his equilibrium. But as a Minister he was a mistake, and as a Minister addressing a turbulent set of electors he was, if possible, an even greater mistake. He lost his calmness, his wits, his memory, made random shots at questions he did not understand, gave absurd answers to those which he did, and involved himself in difficulties ; he compromised

the Government; and extricated himself and them from the toils in which his nervousness had wrapped around them by dint of lengthy correspondence in the local journals.

Mr. Blocke Head's laches arose from softness of that prominent part of the body from which he derived his name; Mr. Jonathan Sloe's arose from his one-sided disposition, which could never permit him to judge an opponent fairly, and from constitutional glibness of speech which, not infrequently betrayed him into coarseness of language. Ability to curb his tongue and to restrain the free expression of the emotions agitating him had not been one of his characteristics, nor had he acquired it with the acquisition of official robes. In September he had at Diddleham spoken in a most unpolitic manner of various members of Parliament; he now at Shodditon repeated the error. He expended his great oratorical strength in mere abuse, urged on doubtless by the dread spectre of opposition, which the Cabinet felt rather than saw, taking form and shape against the beginning of the next session.

CHAPTER III.

FROM pure desire for excitement, and as a refuge from burning thoughts, Avondale occasionally went to Clair Street. Indeed, he spent more of his evenings at the gaming saloon than was altogether advisable. Wyversley, Brayclift, Stanley Carlton, Talbot, Stansville, and many others were often there, and they were glad to welcome Avondale, who was good at cards as at billiards, and who could joke with the best, though he would not make the acquaintance of the blackleg. He tried hard, very hard, to rescue Brayclift from the set that were devouring him, but he could not. The young nobleman thanked him sincerely for his kind intentions, and would gladly, at any time, spend an hour or two with him; but he was already deeply involved, he was deficient in the moral courage requisite to extricate himself, he was not without the gamester's hope that luck

would change ; and he plunged on, till after next year's Derby when the crash came ; the furniture in the town house was every bit and scrap sold, down to the kitchen towels, the fireirons, the crockery, and the jam pots. Half the country estates were alienated, and the remainder heavily mortgaged ; the family seat was let to a Birmingham button maker ; and the Marquis himself, a new spirit created in him, as not unseldom happens, by his misfortunes, threw off his title and rank and went to Australia as manager of one of Mr. Jardine's estates.

Wyversley, too, was in town, and he wasted much of his leisure at Lilybank. Avondale experienced no difficulty in getting him to give the congé to the turfites, who had already assisted him to run through £100,000, for in this he was assisted by Auricoma ; but the persuading him to separate himself from her was a totally different matter, for in this he was opposed by Auricoma. He himself went not seldom to Lilybank, now seeing her and Wyversley alone, now the house filled with a giddy crowd of young life. But most of his visits gave him a fit of

the blues, not on account of the folly or misery of human nature, not on account of the dissipation that he observed, or of the wealth that was being squandered; of these matters he took a very philosophic view, considering all men when arrived at years of discretion fully competent to judge of their own happiness or welfare for themselves; but because he felt each time a more genuine sympathy for Auricoma. She was acting fairly and honourably towards Wyversley who would, with little hesitation and less persuasion, have married her, had she chosen to ask it; but she left him to decide for himself. She brought no influence to bear, she used no blandishments, she simply loved him with the love of a strong-minded and beautiful woman, who had no other stay or hope; and who can estimate the intensity of such a passion? She was, however, attempting to prepare herself for the position his wife should fill. Grace, tact, taste, Nature had given her. She sang and played well; French Wyversley had already taught her, and she was rapidly beating him at Italian, and was ever delighted when Avondale would give her a

few minutes' conversation in that language. Avondale was in the greatest perplexity. He pitied truly and sincerely the poor girl; he was equally concerned for his friend who was drifting on to what society would consider destruction. He did not venture to speak to the Countess about it, for he was persuaded that such a course would but produce strife between mother and son. He gave Exmoor a few hints, and was not much surprised to find that he was pretty well acquainted with the matter. They agreed, however, to keep Wyversley as far as possible out of harm's way by finding him employment in canvassing members whose votes they wished to secure.

He also seized every pretence of taking Wyversley to the Jardines, and of throwing him in the way of Mary Jardine; and his exertions succeeded so admirably that the young lady lost her heart, even if she did not secure one in return. She was sprightly, vivacious, nonchalant, and relying on these qualities, she bantered the Earl upon his becoming a political adventurer, laughed at the change that had come over his

character, in that he was now active and ambitious who had been indolent and dreamy, quizzed him on his disregard of female wiles, and ended by falling in love with him herself, as all young ladies who deem themselves proof against the tender feeling, do fall in love, desperately in love, before they are aware of the dangerous proximity of the youthful son of Ares and Aphrodite.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTMAS drew on. No other batch of peers had yet been created, no further defection from the Ministerial ranks had taken place. FitzHenry, Exmoor, Jardine, and Avondale had been dining at the house of the first, and were running over their prospects on the last occasion of meeting before dispersing for the Christmas vacation.

“Great nuisance,” said FitzHenry, “that I have to plead Broadcloth’s case for him next term. I believe he has the law on his side, and if so, any one else would have done as well.”

“My dear sir,” exclaimed Jardine in pretended astonishment, “you really don’t mean to say that lawyers have, in professional matters, any conscience at all. I always thought you considered yourself, when in court, as so many machines, receiving facts and statements at one extremity and turning them out at the other duly

dressed and polished ; that your consciences are, if not like Mr. Figgs' pound weights three ounces short, at least distinct parts of your organisation, which you can detach from the whole, and leave at home in charge of the mistress when you go forth in the morning."

"You must not be quite so hard on us, Jardine. Besides, I scarcely think you can be in earnest. Take Pilgrim. It is because he has a conscience that we hope to win him over—though, as yet, I see little hope of accomplishing it."

"Have you tried him much?" asked Exmoor.

"As far as one can venture, without being rude. He seems resolved, if Maitland and Rowe will leave Church and State alone, to give them a fair trial."

"They will leave Church and State alone next session," observed Avondale. "Not much fear of that. They may go meddling about it a little and offend a good many without conciliating any, but they will not make such an onslaught on the sacred union as to alarm good Sir Edward. I have much greater faith in Maitland making

some rash appointment to a bishopric, and in that way getting rid of his Attorney-General."

"I have not thought of that," said FitzHenry. "I know Pilgrim was much annoyed when Tracy's name was mentioned last summer for Doncaster. Maitland would not unlikely wish to put him in at the next vacancy."

"Most likely," said Avondale. "Then Dr. Nocrede is another intimate friend of Maitland's. If, by any set of circumstances, these two were raised to the episcopal bench, Sir Edward and the Premier would part company. Even as it is I doubt if there is such a firm union between them as you imagine. The slight hints which Abel furnished Mr. Jardine with some time since, show that however level the surface may be, the waters are in commotion beneath. Maitland has no religion, if politics stand in the way; Rowe has none at all, under any circumstances; Sloe's chief dogma is hatred of the National Church—is it possible that these views can long avoid clashing with those of Sir Edward, who puts his church before his worldly prospects or his country's welfare, who would, unhesitatingly, in

defence of that Church and her privileges and formulas, head another band around whom should be again lighted the fires of Smithfield?"

"Really looking at the matter in all its bearings," said Jardine, "I do not think Pilgrim can work long with the present Government—but how to detach him early in January?"

"The bishop of Ilminster is in failing health," replied Avondale. "His life and the year may easily come to an end together. Could no means be devised for tempting Maitland to send Tracy or Nocrede to Ilminster in his place? This done, could not the modern Chrysostom, whose golden tones cause even the Chief Justice to smoothe his rugged brow—could not he, backed up by the eloquence of three ex-Ministers' and of two in prospective, find words to persuade Sir Edward to cut loose from the unkempt crew with whom he is now associated?"

"But, Avondale," expostulated Exmoor, "have some pity on our inferior intellects; don't sneer quite so pointedly. You treat us as Rowe does a deputation of poor law guardians or shop-keeping vestrymen. How are you going to give

the first blow to your chain of balls, so that the shock may in good time reach the last, and send it flying off from its neighbours?"

"You will do that. Frescheville has not received his promotion yet."

"True enough, and he is rather savage about it."

"His house is not far north of Avonmouth, and not so very many miles from Sir Charles Popworth's, where you said a day or two ago you will be spending the New Year's week. If a vacancy happens between now and then, I imagine that you might do something with Frescheville. You will, of course, while in Lyddonshire see him once or twice; he is, my sister tells me, to be at Lady Popworth's ball. If you have any objection to humbugging him I have none. I will, if you will stand by and nod occasionally, persuade him first that Maitland has treated him very badly, secondly, as a slight apology, and as a mark of deference to his superior abilities, that he ought to have the nomination to the vacancy, and thirdly, that Dr. Nocrede—Pilgrim detests him—ought to be appointed."

“Capital, capital,” said FitzHenry. “Frescheville will take the bait ; so will Maitland, too, if, Avondale, you let him understand that Jardine is favourably disposed to Nocrede.”

“I bar that,” objected the Scotchman. “Our consultations generally would, if carried on for any other purpose, make us liable for an indictment for conspiracy, and I must really refuse to allow any one to be under the impression that I should be delighted to see Nocrede—or even Satan himself—attired in the lawn of a bishop.”

A laugh drowned Jardine’s expostulations. “We won’t compromise you, my dear sir,” replied Exmoor. “But, Avondale, how will you secure a hearing with Frescheville? You are on such bad terms with Jessie, and she is the real head.”

“My dear Exmoor, what genuine simplicity ! Kiss and make friends, to be sure. After a tiff and a reconciliation, lovers are closely in love. We should be as intimate as could be for, perhaps, a whole week.”

“That nasty grating tone, Walter,” said Mr. Jardine.

“I am very sorry, sir.” To Exmoor, “How is Digby now?”

“Nearly well again. I had a note yesterday from the Marchioness. She said he was to leave the Towers to-day or to-morrow. What is your opinion of him as a politician, FitzHenry?”

“Will never be anything—too changeable. He was an obstinate Tory when he took his degree, he is a rampant Rad now. His brother is just the same—he would be a Tory if it weren’t for Englander, he would be a Liberal if it weren’t for Maitland.”

“Too proud to follow, yet without the brains sufficient for a leader,” observed Avondale.

“Maitland would be a splendid follower,” said FitzHenry, “if he could curb his ambition. He has, no one can deny it, vast genius, capacity, and energy, but he is impulsive, wayward, obstinate, as a child—more’s the pity. In another respect, too, he is not fitted for a leader—he cannot take in at one glance the full details of a great measure, he must see it piece-meal, his mind is not comprehensive, and so he often becomes a mere advocate.”

“Very true,” assented Exmoor. “He is a man that rises above his fellows, but his defects are such as to prevent him governing those over whom he towers. By the by, I suppose Claybourne would take Sir Edward’s place—who would be solicitor?”

“Greenham Softhead,” said FitzHenry.

“Nonsense.”

“He would, I assure you.”

“But he is too young,” objected Avondale.

“No younger than myself. He is a connecting link between Sloe and Rowe, a representation, though faint, of both. He has their bad qualities in double intensity, and unredeemed by their good points. He has the demagogue’s hatred for titles, but it is not an honest hatred like his; he has the philosopher’s contempt for imbecility, but it is the contempt which one fool ever has for another.”

“Very pretty,” said Exmoor, laughing. “If Jardine and I associate much more with such close observers as you and Avondale, we may be inoculated with some of your causticity and sarcasm. I presume we have our arrangements

settled for the next fortnight or so. When does Kerr come up?"

"By the middle of January," replied Jardine.

"So does Herbert Williams, for whom Bransdon and myself will answer. There will be a new Minister of Education before Parliament re-opens."

CHAPTER V.

NOEL, Noel, Noel! Christmas, king of good fellows, who comest with cheerful countenance, and laughing loud, and who bringest mirth, and joy, and gladness to the rich, the wealthy, the fortunate—who comest with gloomy visage, and frowning dread, and who bringest pain and cold, and death to the poor, the hungry, the outcast. No need for me to sing again for the myriadth time thy song of jollity, and welcome; and I cannot rouse the dirge of despair, and the funeral chaunt, with which multitudes greet thy advent.

Stuart Jardine accompanied Avondale to Avondale. He had been looking forward eagerly for the moment when he should, as his mother put it, revisit Lyddonshire.

“Not going to spend Christmas day with us, Stuart,” she said. “You wish, I suppose, to revisit Lyddonshire?”

“Yes, mater,” he replied, looking rather foolish, while Mary laughed somewhat unnecessarily, and his father added—

“Stuart is suddenly grown very fond of the country. A month ago he was desperately anxious to come up to town. Now, he is just as anxious to get away. Perhaps, the last few days’ rain has improved the appearance of the country generally ; still, I myself must confess, I prefer London just now—though there is no accounting for tastes.”

So Stuart went, and Edith received him with a pleasant smile, and with a touch of the hand that sent a tremor through his body, and made him blush and stammer like a boy. He, however, soon recovered his speech, and had as much to tell her as if he had been on a tour to the mountains of the moon, or engaged in a conspiracy to dethrone Burra-Booda-Bumptious, tyrant of the Gaboon, and had narrowly escaped being served up for dessert at that potentate’s table. And, certainly, his adventures, though not so startling, appeared to afford the utmost interest to both parties.

“But, if I could not hear from you, Edith—may I call you Edith, please?”

“Certainly not, sir.”

“If you please—and that fellow, Vrynne, always calls you Edith; I know I shall punch his head some day. Besides, you may, in revenge, call me Stuart.”

“Go on, sir, with what you were saying.”

“I did so long to hear from you, but I had to content myself with such scraps as Polly would read out to me from her letters. However, I bagged all the others that I could lay hands upon—a whole half-dozen.’

“It was very wrong of Polly to let you have the opportunity of seeing any of my notes, very wrong. I am quite angry with her.”

“Of course you are—and with Walter too, for I got one from him—don’t look so cross, please—the last one. He handed it to me to read what you said about the people who will be at Lady Popworth’s ball; and I folded up the blank half of a note of my own, and put in the envelope, and handed it back to him. He could not find it afterwards, though he searched everywhere.”

“It was a very ungentlemanly action, Mr. Jardine. I am surprised at your doing it.”

“But I got the letter, though.”

“Which you will please return to me.”

“Oh, Edith—Miss Edith, I mean—that would be unnecessary cruelty.”

Miss Avondale tried to look cross, but she could not.

Stuart Jardine was very attentive to her during the whole of the visit—too attentive, the house-keeper thought, when the frost had set in, and there was no excuse for him for staying at home. So she stated rather pointedly to him that,—

“Young men ought not to stay indoors in the country. It is dry overhead, and underfoot, Mr. Jardine, and you can go for a walk, or a ride, whichever suits you.”

Christmas eve they spent at Mr. Vrynne's. It was the first time Avondale had, for a whole year, seen Miss Vrynne. Edith had been nervously anticipating the meeting. The marriage of her brother with Florence was a hope whose realisation she had long desired. She had noticed an indefinable change in him. He was

not exactly the same as in the summer, there was a something in his manner which she felt rather than actually observed. He did not care for Miss Dawson, of that she was convinced; did he for any one else? Stuart Jardine thought not. But her suspicions were more than confirmed when he met Miss Vrynne. The father greeted him warmly, so did the daughter, who was now, as Edith had once said, "so beautiful." She had been on the Continent for many months, and the tour and the absence had added the finishing touches to her loveliness. Her hair was thick, wavy, glossy, like Edith's, and her eyes were blue, though of a deeper tint; but her face was of a different style of beauty, more classic, and the features finely chiselled.

Poor Avondale! No wonder he got confused when Mr. Vrynne wished him "a merry Christmas," no wonder he hesitated when Florence held out her hand, no wonder he was unable to return a fitting reply when both congratulated him on the reputation he was acquiring. Poor fellow! He was, in matters of love, at least, but an ordinary mortal, erring, weak, short sighted.

He did not know his heart; that is his only excuse.

He thought he was in love with Frances Dawson, but it was only romance and vanity—a fit of that distemper which attacks the soul of all of us in our boyhood's days, like measles and mumps infest the body. He was, for the time being, in love with Clare Campion, but it was a blind passion, working upon a spirit mortified by disdain and yearning for consolation, and fed by a chivalrous sympathy for a kindred mind.

He now saw Florence Vrynne, the companion from infancy upwards of himself and his sister; he saw her after an unfortunate absence, at a most critical period, clad with roses, radiant as Rhodus when first Helios beheld her rising from the sea, with the light upon her golden hair, and the bloom upon her cheek; he saw her matured in intellect as Clare Campion, matured in grace as Clare Campion was twelve weary years before; he saw her—I cannot say he loved, but he could not converse with her as easily as he did in earlier life.

But, be that as it may, in a few days he did

love her. Both were, on New Year's Eve, at Lady Popworth's ball; half the county had assembled at their member's summons. Florence Vrynne was, by universal acclaim, the queen. She laughed and talked, and won the homage of all, but there was a piteousness in her pleasure which Edith Avondale, the twin star of the evening, could not fail to detect. Walter was most attentive to her, but his attentions either were not those of a devout lover, or they were purposely relieved of warmth and glow.

It was a joyous evening—country people do, I fancy, always enjoy themselves at their reunions more than inhabitants of the towns. They may be somewhat distant at first, but, when the frigidity is rubbed off, they go in for unrestrained amusement. They are without the alarm that haunts all large assemblies in towns--the alarm of making disagreeable acquaintances. No need to fear that at a county ball one will meet the tailor who brought you some half a dozen hours since the vest that sets off your figure so well, and for which you were eternally obliged to him; no need to keep a sharp look out lest you run

against the skilful artist to whose defty hand the auburn locks that cluster round your intellectual brow owe so much of their magnificence.

Such *rencontres* may be very proper, and we may all at social science tea-fights uphold the necessity of such intercourse between class and class, and it may sound wretchedly caddish to confess that we dislike them; but they do, nevertheless, create a certain amount of embarrassment—to one side at least. At a county ball every one knows that, though his neighbour be personally a stranger to him, yet he comes of good family and belongs to a rank equal to his own.

It is a hard fight for an outsider to get admittance. Sir Jacob Screwdriver, the manufacturer of half the tools used on the face of the globe, may heap up a pot of money, may contrive to stick “Sir” before and “Bart.” after his patronymic; may purchase the mansion which the extravagance of His Grace of Glenlivat or the Most Honourable of Brayclift has compelled him to sell; may crowd together there tons of ancient statues—recently made—and yards of paintings by old masters—of which neither paint nor can-

was was in existence ten years before; may get rid of pastor, and deacon, and elder, and diligently put in an appearance every Sunday at the Parish Church, which his early Radicalism incited him to revile—he may do all this, but the pettiest of petty squires, the man whose barony is now a farm round which a half-hour's walk will easily take him, coldly refuses the overflowing hospitality of the new baronet and deems him a far inferior animal.

“His overflowing hospitality?” That is, perhaps, not quite the fact. It is the mean greatness and the shopkeeping hauteur of the *parvenu* which estrange good families from him. Let him be possessed of a generous disposition, a kind heart, a frank demeanour, and, whatever his origin, whatever his line of life, whatever his little defects in manners or breeding, he will meet with few so churlish as to shut their doors against him.

To Stuart Jardine the ball seemed all that was delightful. He had hitherto cared little for dancing, and less for parties where the female element was in preponderance, but in this respect

his feelings had undergone a radical change. He could also bathe his eyes and see that Vrynné, though very intimate with Edith, was in love, if with any one, with Alice, the second daughter of the host. Still with the inconsistency and jealousy of an ardent admirer, he could never observe him speak to Miss Avondale, never hear him address her as "Edith," without being terribly annoyed and terribly angry.

And I fear that both Miss Avondale and Miss Popworth took many an opportunity of playing upon his feelings. They praised Vrynné to him as being a genius, as being most amiable and considerate, as being most chivalrous and polite, and never in a bad humour or sulky temper, while they lectured him upon his discourtesy when he was perspiring with his exertions to obtain their good opinion, and upon his taciturnity, though he had been chattering like a Frenchman; and then Edith would say, "Charlie, do this or that," and all three would laugh till Jardine would be near bursting with spite and vexation. But a smile or a look, or, "hold my fan, if you please, Mr. Jardine," or, the chance dropping of a flower

or, "Yes, I am not engaged, and you may put down your name on my tablet, so that I may not forget," and Stuart was again happy as a king.

But not so, Avondale, who was agitated with a singular variety of feelings. He could not blot from his memory the confession twice made to Clare Champion, he could not for many minutes together keep his eyes off Florence Vrynné. The strife and contending rush well-nigh sickened him; yet he compelled himself to don a beaming countenance, and to banter, and chaff, and joke, for he was the cavalier of Jessie Frescheville. She, the Earl, and Countess were the guests of Lord Whatcombe, and had received, through him, invitations. Whatcombe had spoken to them very highly of the Avondale family, and of Walter in particular, and was greatly interested to learn that they were already acquainted with him. Exmoor was also one of the company, and the Bishop of Ilminster having expired a few days previously, he was, with Avondale, busily engaged in carrying out their pre-arranged plan.

Politics and the ball room, a county ball room! —the incongruity struck Avondale most forcibly.

He looked around the glittering crowd, and bitter was the reflection that his heart, which ought to have been the lightest, was probably the saddest there.

One of the guests was Sir Arthur Fernie, the owner of large property in South Lyddonshire, a man some three or four years older than himself. He was intimate with Mr. Vrynné, and a something more than admirer of Miss Vrynné. Avondale had once or twice during his present visit heard Sir Arthur's name coupled with Miss Vrynné's—he was now a witness to his attentions, and he could not interfere.

Jealousy, thy pangs are next to the tortures which a woman's malice will inflict, the most unendurable of sufferings that can befall poor humanity.

Avondale absolutely sickened as he saw Fernie filling the place he had hitherto filled by Miss Vrynné's side, and filling it, too, apparently, in the good opinion of her father. He grew faint. Exmoor was near. "The room is insufferably hot, Exmoor; give me your arm; I want a glass of brandy or a mouthful of fresh air." The

Marquis walked with him into the breakfast parlour.

“You look white, Avondale. But can you drink off brandy like that? What’s the matter?”

“Nothing; most of us get a twinge and a qualm now and then—but it does good; purifies the blood, I suppose.”

CHAPTER VI.

EARL FRESCHVILLE had not yet received his Marquisate, and he was much enraged thereat. This Avondale easily learnt from the Lady Jessie, who had again grown wonderfully kind and condescending—perhaps because she observed how intimate Whatcombe and Exmoor were with him, perhaps because she could read aright the schemes that kept flitting through his brain, perhaps because—but it is no use speculating on the origin of many a fair lady's whim. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, but no man knoweth whence it cometh or whither it goeth.” Be this as it may, she danced with him so often as to draw down on her a reproof from her mother, and to inflict on Florence and Edith a pang which Stuart Jardine did his best to remove.

“He does not care a pin for Lady Jessie Frescheville, indeed he does not, Miss Edith; I

am sure of it. He is only paying her compliments and pouring flattery into her ear in order to get at her father."

"But he has no business to flatter her. It is altogether ungentlemanly—you are all ungentlemanly—I should not have supposed Walter could do so."

"But, it is surely not unpolite of him to flatter her or any other lady. She likes it, and it won't do any harm—she, of course, estimates it at just what it is worth."

"It will do harm, it will. Poor Florence! why does he not flatter her?"

Then Stuart knew distinctly, what he before could only darkly guess at. He had heard at his former visit, and since from his sister, quite sufficient to give him a hint of the relations between the two families, but not till now did he understand the full import of the hint—not till next evening, when Edith told him how earnestly her father and herself wished for the marriage, how Mr. Vrynné had, whatever his present wishes were, also desired it, and how poor Florence!—but her feelings she would not betray.

“Walter does not care for any one, I am sure he does not,” was all that Stuart could repeat. “I should know it if he did. While he has been in town I have not during the last two years missed many days without seeing him, and I know all his affairs. He was much vexed last summer about Miss Dawson. He cannot have fallen in love since. He would be just as likely to be in love with Polly as with Lady Jessie Frescheville. He must like Miss Vrynne, he certainly must—she is so beautiful, almost as beautiful as yourself.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, please; and take care of your queen. See you have got into a nice fix. You must lose queen or castle by my knight, and I shall check you also next move, and then take the bishop afterwards.”

They were playing chess after dinner in the library, an antique apartment on the ground floor, with dark oak wainscotting, and having many portraits hung round. The game had lasted a very long time, for it was often interrupted by conversation. They were by themselves by the fire at one end of the room—“not to be disturbed

in the game"—with Edith's Italian greyhound on the hearthrug; while at the other were the housekeeper, the widow of a late incumbent of Avondale church, Mr. Avondale, and a guest from town who had run down that morning. One at least of the two players found the game interesting as chess never had been before.

Avondale was the same evening at Whatcombe dining with the Lord-Lieutenant, Frescheville, and Exmoor. Lord Whatcombe, receiving a hint from Exmoor, had at the ball pressed on him the invitation which he was nothing loath to accept. Whatcombe was a Whig rather than a Liberal. He believed in Liberalism when it meant the ascendancy of a few great houses, not the admission of all classes to a share in the Government. He was, therefore, by no means an adherent of the present Ministry, and, Exmoor having made him acquainted with some slight portion of the schemes of the Opposition, he had no objection to assist in fanning the flame of discontent that was rankling in Frescheville's heart. The Earl willingly swallowed the bait. Persuaded in his own mind that he possessed wonderful faculties and

resistless influence, the persuasion became a certainty when Exmoor and his host skilfully flattered his self-conceit. Persuaded that the Premier had, out of pure jealousy and personal ill-will, overlooked his claims for promotion, he, without much hesitation, assented to the advice that he should both demand a Marquisate and recommend Dr. Nocrede for the see of Ilminster.

"The Premier must be a most two-faced man," he lamented.

"A modern edition of Janus," suggested Avondale.

"Yes; he sees half a dozen ways at once, and puts on a different mask for each person with whom he has anything to do."

"Most improper—decidedly dishonourable."

"Of course it is, Mr. Avondale—conduct utterly unbecoming a gentleman. I am sure that in order to gain a point with any one, you would never be guilty of such contemptible proceedings as to pretend great concern and respect for him and to make innumerable promises, and then as soon as you have obtained your end, forget pretences and promises, and consign your darling friend to oblivion."

Here Exmoor gave Avondale such a quizzing glance, that the latter, to avoid a burst of laughter, was compelled to take refuge behind his pocket handkerchief. Recovering himself after some minutes' very needless application of that article of dress to his olfactory organ, and having swallowed a glass of port consequent upon Lord Whatcombe's observation, "a bit of a cold, Mr. Avondale—try some wine"—he said,

"No, no, my lord, I trust I should never attempt to mislead any one whose good opinion I wished to retain," which assertion was the exact truth.

"But Mr. Maitland has evidently treated you very shabbily."

"Very shabbily," exclaimed the Earl, warming with the sympathy exhibited. "Why I actually invited him and Sloe—yes, positively Sloe, who has so often reviled me—" ("Most Christian condescension!")—"him and Sloe to my house to meet Bayswater and Tintern, when Tintern was going to resign because of the muddle Blocke Head had got the Home Office into about that extradition case."

“ Ah, I understood it was owing to you that the matter was smoothed over,” said Exmoor, who, by the by, had not, till the present moment, heard anything about the actual quarrel between Blocke Head and the sub., though, of course, he was perfectly acquainted with all the other facts.

“ Yes, Exmoor, entirely owing to me. Bayswater came to me a week or so after I left Egremond, because he knew how angry Tintern was, who had joined us a day or two previously. Tintern had, in fact, sent in his resignation.

ayswater begged him to withdraw it, and as he would not, we telegraphed for Maitland. The Premier came at once, bringing Sloe, who happened to be staying with them. Both were greatly grieved at Tintern’s determination ; they estimated his abilities very highly. Sloe apologised for any words or speeches of his which might have annoyed Tintern. That is one good point—the only good point—about that demagogue. If he is abusive he will generally, when his conduct is shown to be offensive, confess the error of his ways, and make the *amende honorable*.

He spoke to me in a way I could not have given him credit for ; said that though he experienced an instinctive hatred to titles generally, yet it was to the title, to the hereditariness, not to the person bearing it, and that for me he had the utmost regard."

"Mr. Sloe is doubtless a most excellent man at heart," observed Avondale, though doubting whether there were any dolt or knave in the British Isles who could not humbug Frescheville.

"Most excellent, and he completely won over the Countess. Well, Tintern assured Mr. Sloe that he was on the best terms with him, though he considered it would be better if he (Sloe) would now and then, at public meetings, say nothing at all if he could not avoid trenching on dangerous ground. They debated and bothered for a long time, till at last Tintern flatly declared he would no longer remain in the Cabinet in any inferior post. After a pause Sloe said, 'Could we not do without Mr. Herbert Williams? His views are scarcely advanced enough.' Bayswater looked at Maitland, and then answered slowly,

‘I imagine so. We cannot afford to lose you, Tintern; what say you to that department?’ Tintern protested that he should be most unwilling to be in any way the cause of Mr. Williams’ withdrawal; but, of course, the whole of the Ministry would make similar protests under the like circumstances; and they wound up the conclave by agreeing to get rid of Williams, by fair means or foul, as the necessity might be.”

“A band of conspirators!” exclaimed Avondale.

“So you will say when you hear how they behaved to me. Maitland and Bayswater were immensely obliged; they could not sufficiently express their thanks for the great services I had rendered them. I had, of course, been unceasing in my endeavours with Tintern, and had added my argument to theirs to prevent him deserting them. I wished no thanks, I had simply acted as my conscience prompted me, and so I told them, but I did remind Bayswater of the offer made voluntarily by him, and without solicitation from me, that I should be raised a step in the peerage. Maitland would do any-

thing, and Sloe was especially profuse—a Dukedom, the Garter, and I know not what—I could not have imagined that he, such an advanced Radical, would have been so ready to honour one of his fellows; but he is a most discriminating individual, and, I fear, has been judged too harshly. (The solution of the cause of Sloe's gushing liberality was probably that arrived at afterwards by Avondale and Exmoor, viz., that the honourable gentleman had such an utter contempt for coronets and crosses as to deem them only fit for baubles with which to amuse dolts and simpletons, and that, consequently, considering Frescheville the aptest representative of these sections of humanity, he had been ready to heap upon him any number of the glittering toys.) Now, will you believe that I have not since heard one single word from either of them upon this subject?"

"Disgraceful!" ejaculated Exmoor.

"Double dealing," exclaimed Whatcombe.

"But I fear it is only what one may expect when one joins in a conspiracy," said Avondale.

"I have no doubt your lordship's conscience has

often smitten you for the part you had in bringing about the dismissal, for it is no less, and under circumstances of the grossest indignity, of Mr. Williams."

"Yes, Mr. Avondale, I have since bitterly regretted the part I took. To think that I should have thus assisted men so utterly unworthy of assistance. Ingratitude is the most heinous of crimes. Of course, as I have said, I desired no recompense for my exertions, but the idea that I should have been employed by them as a tool, and should be now thrown aside without receiving the acknowledgment promised, is intensely annoying."

Frescheville spoke with the most delightful simplicity. Whatcombe looked at Exmoor, and then suddenly wheeled round and made a violent attack upon the fire; Exmoor dropped his handkerchief and had great difficulty in untwisting it from the leg of his chair. Avondale sipped his wine; then, in gravest tone—

"Abominable duplicity on their part; one would scarcely have expected such conduct from the Duke of Bayswater, but you don't know

whom to trust. I presume Mr. Digby took upon himself at Egremont to make proposals of some kind or other to your lordship?"

"Yes, he did," replied the Earl, viciously, "but dissimulation is always punished in the long run. You see he broke his leg directly afterwards."

"He richly deserved it. Your lordship has been far too open-hearted, far too apt to put other men on a par with yourself."

"I fear I have been; I will not make the same mistake again."

"Digby, no doubt, pretended to be entrusted with full power to enter into negociation with you; pretended to have vast interest, direct and indirect, with the Ministry."

"He did; he said, perhaps not in as many words, that he was familiar with Bayswater's wishes and intentions, and that he was directed to act as plenipotentiary; then hinted at a dukedom."

"And yet he was only scheming for his own ends all the while."

"How so, Mr. Avondale? How so? He may

have been boastful and not quite straightforward, but it could hardly have all been lies what he told me."

"It is again your lordship's deep sense of honour which has prevented you seeing Digby in his real colours. He was a Tory a year or two since; he is a Radical now."

"Ah, I forgot; that is bad."

"It should have made you suspicious of him; but what surely must clear up any doubt you still have as to his motives, is the fact that the late creation of peers included his cousin, Lord Engaine, and his intended father-in-law, Mr. Strickland. Digby has played his cards well."

"He has, Mr. Avondale," exclaimed Frescheville, jumping up in a towering rage. "He is a thorough swindler, no better than those fellows at Waterbridge. I saw the names, but the import of the connection did not strike me. He is no gentleman, Mr. Avondale, no gentleman. Do you think, Whatcombe, that any gentleman could descend to such behaviour?"

"Utterly unprincipled," assented Whatcombe.

"Mean, base, treacherous. His principles are

those of the rogue who drugs or hoodwinks you first and then picks your pocket at leisure. Why he actually assured me—on my honour he did—that our young friend was the plotter he himself turns out to be, and, having thus produced a bad impression in my mind, he persuaded me to leave Egremond lest my confiding disposition should expose me to the risk of being involved in his political manœuvres. I am very sorry, Mr. Avondale, and I apologise for the opinion I was thus induced to form of you.”

“Don’t mention it, my lord—let it pass away,” replied Avondale, with the most Christian forgiveness.

The Earl being thus in a proper state of feeling, yielded implicitly to the recommendations of Exmoor, and agreed to return to town with that nobleman two days later, and to present his demands, like a brace of pistols, at the Premier’s head.

“Well, Avondale,” said Exmoor, an hour or two later, in his dressing room, “Whatcombe and myself are both extremely obliged to you for the insight into human nature with which

your skill favoured us this evening. By Jove, I have for well nigh twenty years mingled with all sorts of men; but I have never dreamed that there could be in creation such a consummate ass, such an unmitigated fool, such an unleavened lump of conceit, as Frescheville."

"Yet, it is such as he who compose the majority of the race."

"'Mere puppets, they who come and go,' obedient to the bidding of such as I, acting under the bidding of such as you."

"No, no, Exmoor. It is you who should pull the strings; it is I who run about to see the machine is working well."

CHAPTER VII.

RIDING home next morning, Avondale passed Miss Vryne, attended by Sir Arthur Fernie, and followed by a groom. She bowed, coloured deeply, and he flushed too—the flush of pain. Her image had not been absent from him many minutes together during the last twenty-four hours. While he was occupied, while he was plotting, scheming, planning, he felt easy, but directly politics were banished from his mind, love would take its place. He was only too glad of an excuse for going back to London with Exmoor. There he should be absent from Miss Vryne—perhaps he might forget her.

His sister met him as he entered the Hall. “I hope, Walter, you have settled your political affairs, and can give us a little more of your company.”

“I fear not, dear Edith. I have to accompany Exmoor to London to-morrow.”

“But, Walter! Is it necessary? Jessie Langham and her brother were over here yesterday, and are getting up an impromptu party solely for you and Mr. Jardine next Monday. Please don’t run away. Florence will be there.”

“And Fernie, too, I suppose?”

“What if he is. You know, or ought to know, whether she cares about him. Oh, Walter, how stupidly you behaved at the ball. I was so sorry; and I am quite sure Florence felt your unkindness.”

“No doubt. I don’t exactly see in what my unkindness lay. And, anyhow, Miss Vrynne consoled herself very fairly with the baronet’s assistance.”

It may be taken as an induction obtained from countless instances, that the more unmistakably a man is in the wrong, the more stubbornly he refuses to acknowledge his error, and the more harshly he blames the person to whom he ought to apologise.

“Miss Vrynne,” exclaimed Edith, “have you

forgotten her name is Florence, or is your memory gone with your politeness? I almost think ambition has crazed you. What right had you to be so attentive to Lady Jessie Frescheville?"

"I was no more than ordinarily polite to her, or at least did not intend to be so. But, dear Edith, don't speak quite so unkindly to me. I have had a great deal of bother of one sort and the other." His tone was very weary, and his sister threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him again and again, but she could not prevail on him to change his determination.

"Stuart," he said at lunch, "I am sorry that you and I must be off again to-morrow."

"I hope not," said Mr. Avendale. "Why?"

"Some important transactions will be carried out this week, and Exmoor is anxious I should be present. The resignation of Sir Edward Pilgrim, and Mr. Herbert Williams is daily expected."

"I am sorry, Walter," said his father, "but there will be no need for your guest, Mr. Bayfield, to go too. He and I are great friends, and I intend to show him about the neighbourhood, and

to knock over a few snipe before I let him go."

"Confound you and your politics, Walter," lamented Jardine that evening. "Here I was hoping we had settled down for a week or two."

"But you will have been here nearly a fortnight; and, besides, we shall be down again to attend the grand concert at Newbury, on the 1st of February."

"So we shall, that is some slight consolation, but it is nearly a month yet to it. Oh, dear. I wish I could be transformed into Bayfield for the next few days."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE papers of the Monday morning announced the appointment of Dr. Nocrede to the See of Ilminster; the evening editions of the same announced the resignation of Sir Edward Pilgrim. Frescheville had taken the earliest opportunity of calling on the Premier, who had also returned from the Christmas vacation, as indeed had many others of the Ministry, recalled earlier than usual by the severe illness of one bishop, and the death of another, and by the vague reports that were flying about. Maitland charmed Frescheville by readily acquiescing in his recommendation, at the same time persuading the Earl that he did so entirely to oblige him—though in truth, Nocrede had three days before been notified of the elevation. Maitland also assured the Earl that his services had not been forgotten, that his name had been constantly in the mouths

of his colleagues, that the delay had arisen solely from a consideration of the claims of other parties, that they had hesitated which to offer him—an Irish Dukedom, an English Marquisate, or the vacant Garter. Perhaps his lordship would, now that they had an opportunity which might not occur again of confidential explanations, give him—solely, of course, as a private individual—a hint which of these three would be most acceptable.

The Earl needed no time to consider,—“The strawberry leaves,”—and then, overpowered by the Premier’s condescension, made him acquainted, as far as he could, with the designs of the rival party. But of these his knowledge did not extend far. Exmoor and Avondale had had too low an opinion of his discretion and good sense to admit him into any of their secrets. They had treated him just as the Premier did now—extricated every scrap of information that his little head contained, and then dismissed him, after stuffing the void with humbug and flattery.

It was not alone the elevation of Nocrede which produced the withdrawal of Sir Edward Pilgrim.

FitzHenry had brought all his persuasion into play, and the revelations of the intentions of a certain section of the Cabinet with regard to Williams, a personal friend of Sir Edward, had rendered his efforts successful. Indeed, it is not unlikely, that had Pilgrim remained true to Maitland, Nocrede would not have been appointed. It is difficult to say which was cause and which effect. The Premier distrusted the lawyer's allegiance, the lawyer distrusted the Premier's orthodoxy; so, perhaps, the truest account of the matter is that Pilgrim resigned because Nocrede was promoted, and Nocrede was promoted because Pilgrim resigned. The two events were simultaneous, though, in appearance, one was a few hours the later.

Kerr and Williams returned the next day, the one from Balloch, the other from Llanrhydwr-machyn-glynwrhos-pwllurehchrwgg, a delightful little village at the foot of Gwyffllyn, and at the head of the valley of Bachbwech-y-ddasfwdhull.

The Marquis followed on Wednesday. He gave a dinner on Thursday, which was attended by Exmoor, Jardine, Bransdon, Williams, Avon-

dale, Wyversley, and his nephew, the Marquis of Stonehenge. He was in grand spirits. "Who is to be your new Attorney-General, Williams?"

"Claybourne, I suppose."

"Suppose! Do they treat you as badly as that, and furnish you with such bits of news only as have already appeared in the newspapers? That is rather hard lines."

"Who has issued that order," asked Exmoor, "that all the old pens are to be saved up and be renovated?"

"He won't know," said Jardine, laughing, "but I can tell him. It was Rowe—his logical mind sees things so very clearly that he now and then looks quite over them, and does not see them at all. Whom are you going to put on as goose-quill-scraper? I imagine Blocke Head would be extremely well suited for the post."

"He would lose his way going from one office to another," objected the Marquis.

"He certainly would not be able to keep account of the number of quills he had received from each office," added Bransdon.

"And how much do you hope to save by this

neat arrangement?" enquired Wharfedale. "You must pay your new *employé* at least £2 a week—you could not get an artist fitted for your work for less—and he will, probably, mend half-a-sovereign's worth of old nibs in a month."

"But you forget," said Avondale, "that all the inkstands are to be washed out once a week, and the results sold to the manufacturers of penny ink-bottles. Is it not reported that the President of the Board of Trade intends to stick upon the facade of his department in Whitehall a big board inscribed—

"‘Licensed retailer of ink. N.B.—Any quantity of waste paper for cheesemongers and butter dealers. Also quill pens doubly renovated cheap, and trebly ditto very cheap. N.N.B.—Any articles taken in exchange, especially screws and nails to fasten down some of the loose boards, and a few squares of glass to repair the upper windows.’"

"And is not the Right Honourable John Bayndon, First Lord of the Admiralty, going to put up over his establishment—

"‘Marine stores of all sorts, from candle ends

and rusty nails to damaged cannons and useless ships, sold much below cost price. A few job lots remarkably cheap. N.B.—Clerks and messengers loaned out by the hour, or writing and engrossing done on the premises most expeditiously and at most moderate charges. Worn-out mechanics to be had for a song. N.N.B.—Business done on mutual principles—especially a purveyor of cat's meat would be liberally dealt with, the supply of that article having been cut off at head quarters.' ”

A very undignified roar of laughter broke from all as Avondale concluded. Williams was, however, a most good-tempered man, and bore the chaffing with smiling countenance.

“The whole country must feel under the greatest possible obligation to the present Government,” observed Jardine. “With the new year they have inaugurated the, the, Economium, or whatever is the term. I must appeal to you, Williams—what is the term for the period when the penny-wise-and-pound-foolish system will be in full force? ”

“But there are other occurrences for which

the country will not thank them," said the Marquis. "Look at the state Ireland is in."

"Ireland ever is in a state," objected Williams. "It has been, as long as I can remember anything about politics, the bugbear of lord-lieutenants and premiers."

"It seems to me, however," replied Wharfedale, "to be seething and boiling rather more vehemently now than for some time past. It would be easy to draw up a bill of indictment against your Irish department; and Hainesbury would be a very good man to present it. For him Percy Mulgrave is no match—indeed Mulgrave, miserable enough when advancing with friends to a charge, is simply unable to defend either himself or his colleagues from attack. The preparations bewilder, the approach of the foe terrifies, the actual assault annihilates. In the Upper House, supposing you bundle him there, he will be utterly friendless. Bayswater won't be bothered with him—it is quite enough for his Grace to have to answer for Sloe's escapades—and indeed he is much more likely to assist us in playing off tricks on the new boy; and Herne-

thorpe will be fully occupied with the army estimates. You may be sure then, Williams, we will give it to Master Mulgrave. We will serve him as urchins at school do a trembling novitiate into the realm of torture—pull his hair and pinch his nose, poke pins into him and batter his new hat, steal his cake and sweets, and take away his marbles, till he blubbers; then spank him well to get him into good humour again; and finally, if he is particularly fretful, put him head-first into a dirty coal sack and send him back whence he came.”

Another burst of laughter. “Wharfedale,” exclaimed Exmoor, “I did not imagine you were so vicious.”

“Poor Mulgrave,” soliloquised Williams, “I don’t think I shall be betraying any confidence by saying that he does not altogether appreciate the prospect before him. He dreads the House of Lords as much as Æneas did the temple of the Sibyl.”

“You are betraying no confidence,” said Bransdon. “Dr. Ormond told me yesterday that he had been treating Mulgrave since the begin-

ing of December for malignant *tremor cordis*, combined with gelidification of the marrow, and he added that the disease, though of rare occurrence, was very prevalent now amongst the members of the Government."

So the banter went on, and Williams, if not already determined to resign, had, before the evening closed, come to that resolution.

"When does Hainesbury return?" he asked.

"Next week, early," replied Exmoor. "I had a note from him to that effect this morning. He enquired very particularly after Mulgrave—will doubtless be excessively shocked to hear of the malady that has seized him—and trusted that nothing had intervened to disturb the *entente cordiale* between Sloe and Rowe."

"On the last point the 'Constitutional' the other day could have satisfied him," said Avondale. "The old lady reminded her readers that wolves devoured each other only when they had no common object to fall upon, and that while gobbling up the unfortunate animal, which they had run down, they might yelp and snarl, but they certainly would not actually get to fight."

“Delicate language truly, and neatly put,” remarked Jardine. “By the by, how is it that that journal of Sloe’s, ‘The Pioneer,’ has come to a sudden death?”

“Did you not see the last issue?” said Avondale. “I got it out of curiosity. ‘The Pioneer’ proclaimed that its duty was discharged; that it had led the nation on to the borders of the promised land; that it had accomplished all the objects for the realisation of which it had been, a dozen years ago, started; that its protecting arm, and its counselling voice, might, perhaps, now, without too great risk, be withdrawn from our support; and a whole heap of bosh, winding up with a benediction on the ‘great, the glorious, the unequalled cabinet to whom had been committed—chiefly through the ‘Pioneer’s’ influence—the direction and the development of this magnificent empire.’”

“A sublime peroration, no doubt,” observed Exmoor.

“All which explanation,” added Jardine, “meant that Sloe, having become a Right

Honourable was desirous, like many others when they rise in the world, to shake himself free from ineligible acquaintances ; and had, consequently, locked up the exchequer on which the publishers drew. But the collapse of the journal, immediately that his support was withheld, is a portent and a sign, and shows, as nothing else could show, how little Republicanism there exists amongst the working classes."

Williams remained with Exmoor and the Marquis some little time after the others had left ; he called on Bransdon next morning ; there was a Cabinet council the same afternoon ; and the following morn London knew that Lord Tintern had replaced Mr. Herbert Williams as Minister of Education.

CHAPTER IX.

JANUARY past, February come. The first of this month Avondale spent in Lyddonshire. That day there was an amateur concert at Newbury, on behalf of the hospital. The concert was under the usual "distinguished patronage" of all the neighbouring dignitaries, from Mr. Noodell de Stultus to the Most High, Potent, and Noble Prince, the Duke of Doubledolt. Its programme was really very attractive, on account of both the matter, and the performers. Among the latter appeared Lady Whatcombe, Lady Jessie Frescheville, Alice Popworth, Florence Vrynne, Edith Avondale, and a host of others not known to the reader. Exmoor was there, so was Stuart Jardine, as also his father and eldest sister, who had run down specially for the occasion.

Avondale had longed, yet dreaded, to attend; he yearned to see Miss Vrynne once more, yet the

pleasure would be bought at the cost of much subsequent pain, and of a renewal of the torture which had been somewhat numbed. He often thought of the change that had come over himself and his prospects in the last twelvemonths. A year ago he had, as now, ambitious hopes and dreams, but he had no burning pangs, and he scarcely ever knew the meaning of disappointment or grief, much less of jealousy and mental misery. And, not knowing these, he denied their very existence, or, at least, affirmed that every man might keep himself free from them. He had laughed at love and passion, and had worshipped fame and intellect; he had almost ridiculed the heart and its softer promptings, and had erected into a divinity the brain and its powers. He had, it is true, a something which he styled love, which I have called vanity, for Miss Dawson; but the very weakness of this feeling blinded him to the reality of the master-emotion.

How cruelly had he been undeceived! No maddening passion could, or should, assail his soul, or influence his prospects, or career; yet,

passion for Clare Campion, had well nigh incited him to fling to the winds his prospects, and his career. No maudlin sentimentality, so he deemed the sacred flame, no unmanly spell could ever affect him—and the sentimentality and the spell were on him, and he writhed and groaned as he strove to free himself from them. He would march straight on to where, far ahead on the summit of a precipitous hill, the effulgent gates of fame's magnificent temple lay open wide, his course lighted by the pure lamp of reason; and he would not turn to right or left, either to pursue the dazzling gleams that are extinguished at the touch, or to cull the gaudy flowers whose bright hues fade even as the hands grasp them—this had been his resolve; how had he adhered to it?

Miss Vrynné did not fail to fulfil her engagement. She met Walter and his party before the concert began, and by Edith's skill, she and Walter were thrown together a few minutes.

“You are so much occupied now, Mr. Avondale, that I had hardly hoped you would be present.”

“I am afraid I have been too much occupied, Florence ; for I have not found time even to congratulate you on your return from the Continent, and to ask you how you enjoyed yourself.”

“Very much, Walter ; but towards the end I grew tired, and am very glad to find myself once more in dear old Lyddonshire.”

Poor Avondale ! The speaker’s tone thrilled through him, and he trembled violently ; he had well nigh there and then asked for forgiveness for his coldness ; he, the man with emotionless nerves. She went on—

“You are not looking well ; you are attempting too much—Edith tells me all your schemes.”

Poor Avondale ; not surprising if his face was slightly pale, and if the words that he heard intensified its pallor. He stammered out a reply, and then Mr. Vrynne joined them.

The concert resulted in success—no hitch occurred, no performer but received an encore, but of all, Miss Vrynne obtained the most unstinted applause. She had ever been an excellent player and singer ; her talents were perfected by

her late sojourn in Italy, and to-night she threw her whole soul and life into her endeavours. Sir Arthur Fernie was her attendant, for he had accompanied her and her father from Brentwood, but it was to Avondale that she oftenest glanced, and it was his praise that gratified her the most. The Lady Jessie had coolly appropriated Avondale, though to her father much of his old pomposity had returned. From her he learnt that the Earl's patent as Duke of Belfast would be issued in a day or two.

"I must congratulate him," said Avondale—"Maitland evidently estimates him highly—and at the same time apologise for presuming so far on your goodness as to renew, under such a change of circumstances, a prior acquaintance; but I really did not anticipate the elevation to a dukedom."

"No matter if you had," replied his companion, with a winning smile. "In the present day intellect may rank itself far above titles, and claim, instead of offering, homage."

Avondale could not but acknowledge the compliment, though the conversation was tending in

a direction where he was unwilling to follow. Lady Jessie rallied him on his absentness.

“Wrapped up in politics now? Ah! you can applaud that young lady—she has a splendid voice. Who is she?”

“Miss Vrynné—there’s her father next Lord Whatcombe. She is his only child.”

“How beautiful she is! and an heiress too! Do you know her?”

“Yes, for many years. She and my sister were playmates, and they keep up their intimacy now. Her father and mine are life-long friends.”

“Indeed; who is that with Miss Vrynné—an admirer?”

“I believe so; Sir Arthur Fernie. There’s a report that they are to be married.”

Avondale’s tone caused Lady Jessie Frescheville to look at him inquiringly. Then for the rest of the evening she remained very silent, pondering apparently some knotty problem. Avondale was silent, too, for he could not laugh and chatter while Fernie was occupying the place by Miss Vrynné’s side, which he ought to have occupied, and was rendering the services

which he ought to have rendered. He was very glad when the concert was over, and he could get away out into the dark night, and rush away home and hide himself for a few hours, at least, in his bedroom from the sight of his fellows. His sister followed him to his room.

“Walter, dear Walter, why is it you treat Florence so cruelly? Tell me please.”

But he would not, and indeed could not, tell her anything. He could only attempt to defend himself by reminding her that Sir Arthur Fernie was a constant and apparently favoured visitor at Brentwood; but she saw clearly that this was no explanation.

CHAPTER X.

NEXT morning the Lyddonshire foxhounds met at Duncombe Malreward. The weather was fine but cold, the sky clear, and a South-East wind blowing, and the ground consequently a trifle hard.

Stuart Jardine, Avondale and his sister, and many of those who had been at the concert the preceding evening — Lady Jessie Frescheville, Lord Whatcombe, Exmoor—were at the meet. Miss Vrynné's groom approached Walter and Edith.

“Mr. Walter, if you please, sir, Miss Florence is riding that bay mare, Lily. You know, sir, she is very vicious, not half broken, and she ran away with me last May. The squire is afraid of her, and made me bring another horse, but Miss Florence will ride her. Could you, sir, or Miss Edith, say a word to my young lady?”

They sought her. "Florence, you don't mean to ride Lily—she is quite unsafe."

"Why not, Edith? She is a nice looking mare, trots well and so on, and you don't think I have suddenly forgotten, whatever else I may have forgotten, how to keep my seat, do you?"

"But it is not how to keep your seat, Miss Vrynne," said Walter. "The mare is quite vicious, she might easily take it in her head to bolt, and it's hilly ground we shall be going over to-day. You will certainly be risking your life, if you persist in riding her. Oblige me by changing your horse."

"Mr. Avondale, you are indeed very kind, but the risk is ample temptation to make me adhere to my resolution. Besides you are so occupied that I wonder you can find time to ask a lady such a slight favour as that she should not break her neck."

"Florence, Florence, what are you saying?" cried Edith; but before anything could be added to soften down the harshness of the reply, Mr. Vrynne, accompanied by Fernie, joined them. To the latter Avondale nodded distantly, to the

former he said, "Mr. Vrynné, the horse Miss Vrynné is on is very vicious—I have been trying to persuade her to change it—don't you think she had better do so?"

"I did think so, and Sir Arthur and myself begged her to take another horse, but as Florence turned a deaf ear to our expostulations, I can scarcely imagine she would listen to advice from any one else."

Mr. Vrynné spoke much more coldly than his wont. Avondale was greatly pained by the tone, but he could return no reply, and so, without venturing another look at Florence, who was with difficulty keeping back the tears, he rode off to Exmoor and Stuart Jardine.

They had had two runs but had lost both foxes. The field were now coming along the top of Rawdon Hill. This is a long ridge which everywhere goes down rather steep to the plain, and which for some 400 yards of its side ends in a precipice, 50 to 100 feet high, of sandstone. The summit of the hill is open, but about its foot is a considerable quantity of brushwood and several patches of the same are found elsewhere about it

and on the edge of the precipice. Out of one of these patches the hounds started a fox which made across the precipice and down the hill beyond. Some of the company were cantering along the base of the hill, but the greater part were on the summit.

The former joined in the pursuit, so did the latter slowly and cautiously on account of the steepness—but only for an instant. There was a sudden cry of dismay. Miss Vrynné's horse had broken loose and was speeding after the hounds in a direct line which led straight over the precipice. No help was near, for, even before she was noticed, she was many yards in advance of any other rider. The field pulled up horror-struck; for human aid was useless as the mare could not now stop her headlong career were she to perceive the danger. The ladies shrieked.

“Oh God! my daughter, oh, my daughter,” groaned Mr. Vrynné.

On, on flew the horse, bearing itself and its hapless burden to sure destruction; on, on to the cruel sharpened rocks that many a yard below

were waiting their prey. Several of the gentlemen spurred forward, but what the good?

Suddenly a rider appeared, urging his horse along the very brink of the precipice. He rode madly, and as Miss Vrynné was evidently pulling her own horse's head round, there was the shadow of a chance—the shadow and no more, for in all probability, supposing the gentleman should reach her, the shock of the collision would carry both animals and both riders together over the precipice.

“Avondale, Avondale!” arose.

“Thank God,” exclaimed Sir Charles Popworth, “Avondale's son can save her, if any one can.”

All gazed intensely, scarcely breathing. It seemed an eternity while they watched. A few more strides and Florence Vrynné would be a mangled corpse; and a few more strides and Avondale might pluck her from the jaws of death, the two riders approaching almost at right angles.

But Avondale was too late—would have been too late, if Miss Vrynné's horse, seeing the yawning gulf before it, had not on the very edge

of the chasm thrown itself half round, and attempted to remount the hill. But it could not, the impetus was too great, and an instant only it staggered on the brink with its head turned up the hill and straining to save itself from destruction. The moment, thus gained, however, brought Walter to the rescue. He dashed by holding tight the left rein of his own horse to keep him up the hill, and with his right arm raised the rider from her saddle, her mare simultaneously rolling over the precipice, where it lay, back, leg, and several ribs broken, till a shot put it out of its sufferings. A cheer burst from the whole field, and all hastened forward to meet Avondale, who, having dismounted, was slowly walking up the hill and was joined by Edith and Stuart, who had been but a few yards behind him. Florence was pale but unhurt, and joy was dancing in her eyes. Her father tried to express his thanks, but could only grasp Avondale's hand.

“A wonderful escape,” said all, as they surrounded the rescuer and praised and commended him.

"I was afraid," said Lord Whatcombe, "lest you would be entangled in the stirrup, even if Avondale were in time."

"I had withdrawn my foot," replied Florence, intending to throw myself off, "but hearing some one coming, I determined to take my chance."

"Well, Avondale," said Exmoor, "what will be your next performance. But," *sotto voce*, "excuse my hinting, it is probably owing to you that the catastrophe was so nearly happening. There is, my dear fellow, something or other amiss. Take my advice, and get matters explained; if you are in fault, don't be so foolish as not to confess it."

Many of the meet took dinner at Avondale Hall, which was close by. Lord Whatcombe and Earl Frescheville could not, as it was a considerable distance to Whatcombe, and a carriage was waiting for them. Lady Jessie had been very *distracte*; her good-bye was of the briefest, and it was not for some months that Avondale saw her again.

Next day, in obedience to Mr. Vrynne's earnest invitation, Walter and his visitors went over to

Brentwood to lunch and dinner. Mr. Vrynné showed Avondale how heartfelt were his obligations, but he said little, because he saw that some change had come over his young friend, and he anxiously awaited an explanation which he could not demand. He had at first attributed it to politics and ambition, next to Lady Jessie Frescheville, but observations of Lord Whatcombe satisfied him, partially at least, on the latter point.

Miss Vrynné met Walter in one of the rooms.

“I owe you an apology, Mr. Avondale, for my rude speech yesterday morning ; will you pardon it, please?”

“It is I, Florence, who should ask forgiveness for my incivility to you, but it has been entirely unintentional. I really have not, if you will believe me, wished to be unpolite,” said Avondale, very earnestly, and longing to add more.

“You have not spoken to me much this Christmas, Walter ; but I know you did not mean anything,” replied Florence, drawing nearer.

“But you are so engaged now, that I look upon you almost as one of the giants who the old people say inhabited the Vale.”

“I hope I am, at least, not a very hideous one; not a regular man-eater.”

“Oh, no, I don’t think so,” she replied, looking into his face with a smile, and then casting down her eyes with a blush. “But I have not yet thanked you even for saving my life. How brave and gallant you were, and how good after what I had said an hour or two before.”

“Don’t praise me, Florence. I did only what every true man would do had he the same opportunity; but, indeed, I was so glad it was I and no one else who saved you.”

Avondale was most glad; but, when he started to the rescue, it was not so much the hope of saving Florence as it was with the expectation that both would be carried over together, and strange that the thought was, for the moment, pleasurable—that is, not that Florence should perish, but that death would unite them.

“And I was very glad, too.”

There followed a long pause; Avondale was

ashamed to confess his position with regard to Clare Campion ; nor would he throw off the chain that bound him to her. Then, Florence, in some embarrassment, and with quivering lip added—

“ Because our fathers have so long been friends.”

The conversation continued some minutes longer, till the first dinner bell enabled them to separate ; Florence well-nigh weeping, Avondale well-nigh suffocated with his emotions. Florence and Edith were both very silent during the dinner and afterwards, when Avondale and his friends departed. Mr. Vrynné addressed him in the library very feelingly, but, at the same time, very distantly.

“ You have, Mr. Avondale, saved my daughter’s life. I can put the obligation no higher. You were previously aware that you could rely on my assistance for any purpose—you can now command it. If you offer yourself for the next county election you have my full and entire support ; you will, please, take my place in respect of my tenants and neighbours.”

The speaker’s eye was moist, he meant all that

could be implied in the last sentence, and he hoped for some acknowledgment, but Avondale gave no sign beyond stammering out an unintelligible repudiation of any act beyond what manhood compelled.

As they drove back to Avondale, Florence's face, as Avondale saw it when she said good-bye to him—good-bye, he believed, for ever—paler than it had ever yet been, haunted him; and again the words rang in his ear—"and may be madness to both."

His brain was in such a state that it would be madness to him, at least, if he remitted work. They returned to London next day. He purposed writing to or calling upon Clare Campion, and asking her to release him from his vows; but how could he commit such an act of baseness? It would be insufferably mean and dishonourable. It would be doubly insulting her whom he had already insulted by the very act of winning her affections. Ere he could decide, all need for decision was removed by a letter, received a fortnight later from his sister, in which she stated that the report was confirmed that Sir Arthur

Fernie was to marry Florence in the summer, and that Florence was on the point of leaving Lyddonshire for a warmer climate, in order to avoid the cold winds of the next three months.

BOOK VI.



N E M E S I S.

N E M E S I S .

CHAPTER I.

AVONDALE had succeeded. The nucleus of a party—a party rather—had been originated. It was not yet consolidated, nor had it assumed a definite crystallized shape, but time would do that, and day by day it—the Wharfedale section—was gaining greater strength and greater cohesion.

Full credit, ample justice was given to Avondale by his associates for his exertions. He was a successful man ; his energy was prodigious ; incessantly was he at work. But he now discovered that he possessed emotions as well as intellect. Clare Campion, Florence Vrynné were ever before him. Both images were ever present in his moments of relaxation. He could not forget the former—he longed, with a yearning that was

ever increasing, for one more look on, one more word with the latter, before they were parted for aye.

Parliament had been opened, rather late, the 10th February, a few days prior to which the list of new creations came out—in it our friends Earl Frescheville and Percy Mulgrave as Duke of Belfast and Baron Kilcoe, of Kilcoe, co. Cork, respectively.

In the speech—a document which, thanks to Mr. Rowe's logical intellect, was nearly free from bad grammar, but which, also, thanks to the same, contained two or three sentences which had no meaning, or any meaning according as the reader twisted them about—her Majesty was pleased to inform “My Lords and Gentlemen” that “Ireland was comparatively quiet, save those parts which were in a state of disturbance, and the relations with the Colonies were satisfactory, save in those cases where they were not—that trade was brisk, save in those branches in which it was dull, and the people were prosperous, save in those districts where semi-starvation was prevalent”—and a few other similar bits of news :

that Bills would be brought in in reference to the Church and to Education ; and that a general measure of taxation would be laid before them. The skeleton of this last measure had terrified Kelly, the Chief Commissioner of Customs, and he had resigned ; and thus Rowe was sole Minister of Finance, and one of the improvements made last Session by Mr. Maitland, on his entry into office, was abolished.

The chiefs of the Wharfedale party redoubled their exertions, marshalling and organising their forces ; now the Marquis, now Strathclyde, giving a dinner, and, aided zealously by Lord Hainesbury, strengthening themselves in the Upper House ; while in the Commons the Ministerial outworks were roughly assaulted, and independent members, seeing that the “Talents” were against, rather than with the Government, began to tender their allegiance to Exmoor and Bransdon, FitzHenry and Jardine.

The Marchioness congratulated Avondale.

“But, dear me, he is such a prodigy, that we had better put him into the British Museum, or some such place for public inspection and for

preservation, had we not, Ralph? What did he not do at Waterbridge? Then, at Egremond, he has left a name at which the world grows pale, by taming Sir Henri, and leaping the 'Dead Man's Gap.' Now his energies seem unabated, and to increase with increase of work."

"To which you may add," said Exmoor, "that the other day, at a hunt, he saved Miss Vrynné 'The Flower of Lyddonshire,' from destruction, just as her horse was bearing her full gallop over a precipice," and therewith Exmoor related the occurrence.

"Is Mr. Avondale really himself or some half-a-dozen people rolled into one?" asked the Duke of Strathclyde.

"By the by," said FitzHenry, "Digby has perfectly recovered, it seems. He had rather a hard fight at Leatherton, and the majority, 27, is small, but they won't petition."

"I imagine not," said Exmoor. "His brother has much influence there, besides the Radical element is strong, and he went in heavily for Maitland and Sloe."

"A nice election, that at Scrimmager, a week

ago," observed Strathclyde. "The place was completely sacked."

"Mr. Hardhead made violent speeches," said the Marchioness; "but I suppose the House will be glad to have him back again to enliven them. How is it he is not yet sworn in?"

"He is not dried," said Avondale.

"Not dried—what do you mean?"

"In making his escape from the back of a house that had been attacked by the mob, he plumped down on a water-butt, and said butt's cover being old, he received a complete sousing. He had already imbibed a fair quantity of mountain dew to keep up his courage, he now took a great deal more to counteract the effects of the immersion, and he thus got so thoroughly drenched in the two liquids that, though they put him in front of the furnace fire of the steam packet by which he came over, and have since kept him in the drying room at one of the big laundries, he still drips, drips; and it is reported that some days must elapse before all the moisture is evaporated."

Mr. Hardhead's misadventure caused consider-

able merriment. Then Avondale asked Mrs. Bransdon a riddle—

“Your mentioning Sir Samuel Simpkins reminds me of it. I think it’s a pretty good one. It was given to me the other day. ‘Why is a man’s bald head—our sex alone possess such a characteristic—like Paradise?’”

No one could tell. “The answer is not mine, though the rhyme is—

‘Because it’s raised above this earth, a bright and shining spot,
Where mortal partings are no more, and dy(e)ing is forgot.’”

“Very good! very good!”

“But that is not all. And where, as Wigan would say—

‘Where, though eternities shall run, and age on ages roll,
No more again shall w(h)ig be seen to hang about the poll.’”

CHAPTER II.

THE Wharfedale party tried their paces by preliminary canters in each House. In the Lords a debate on the state of Ireland was opened by Lord Hainesbury. It went on three nights considerably to the discomfiture of the Ministry, though not so distinctly in favour of Wharfedale as he could have wished, since he rather seemed to be playing into the hands of the Tories. Bayswater, of course, spoke for his own side, but he left the new peer, Kilcoe, to sum up the defence. This was to him a most serious undertaking, and he bungled terribly. He began—"Mr. Speaker—no, I mean Lord Chancellor—Sir—that is, my lords, the Government are taking active measures for the protection of life, and, above all, of property in Ireland." This was enough. The Lords, not excluding Mr. Speaker, that is the Lord Chancellor, or the Duke of Bayswater, laughed,

if they never laughed before. It will, probably, be enough for the reader also—he can imagine the rest of the speech. Wharfedale did not push for a division.

Next evening, March 1st, in the Commons, Jardine commenced an attack upon the Colonial policy of the Cabinet, and an animated debate ensued to the manifest advantage of those with Jardine ; but neither was this pushed to a division, lest the result should be the placing the Tories on the Government benches.

Thus affairs in Parliament grew lively. There was a split amongst the Liberals, that was plain ; people wondered to what it would lead. The more far-seeing, who could perceive the tactics of Wharfedale and his section, could perceive also that it was a risky game they were playing, it was a course requiring consummate tact and discretion to ensure success. The problem was this—given 350 Liberals and Radicals, of whom 100 were personal friends of the Ministry, and 50 were doubtful, and 300 Conservatives, of whom 250 were sworn adherents of the Earl of Wigan, and 50 were very doubtful—how to devise matters

so that the 50 variable Tories could be made to work with the 200 independent Liberals, and the combined bands should both hold in check the other Liberals and Radicals, and defeat the Tories? This, it will be conceded, was most difficult. Besides, the independent Liberals had first to be "instructed" to know themselves as forming a body, and to recognise their leaders. This was done partially. During the course of the Colonial debate Jardine had assembled from 50 to 60, and expounded to them his views, which received their full concurrence; and Bransdon had done the same to a similar number before putting a question to the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, touching the treaty with Schlumpfgfheim Gebrgcherger, which had been negotiated the preceding year.

But what more than all else showed the strength of parties were two divisions on motions brought forward by the Tories. The first was on some piece of stupidity of Blocke Hearl's, scarcely worth while to particularise it, as all his performances were of the same character; but, I think, it was because he pardoned a fellow guilty of a

brutal murder, on the ground that "he was the only son of his grandfather, and that his step-mother had, when a child, once assisted at the drowning of a litter of puppies, and this fact might have produced in her a propensity for the destruction of life generally, which propensity she might, from long residence with her step-son, have transmitted to him, and so have rendered him at times unable to control his actions." From the division the Wharfedale chiefs absented themselves, but they sent sufficient of their followers, and only sufficient, to turn the scale for the Ministry, the numbers being for them 247, against 235, showing that about 150 were standing neutral.

The next was a motion, two days later, on some legal point. On this occasion, partly to show their numbers, partly at the special request of Kerr, the Wharfedale section attended in full force; and into the Government lobby went 372, into the other, 241, the majority, 130, being all independent Liberals.

"I don't think we need complain of the division," said FitzHenry to Jardine.

“Decidedly not ; it shows the strength of those whom we may fairly call our own party, who look to us rather than to the Government for direction.”

“We number,” observed Exmoor, “from 120 to 150, who are unswerving followers of the Marquis. This is as many as Englander, apart from the Earl of Wigan, can rely on.”

“But to these must be added at least another 100 of the Liberals who would prefer Wharfedale to Maitland, and the Earl of Cotteswold’s 50 to 60 Conservatives,” added FitzHenry.

“We must contrive to get Cotteswold,” said Jardine.

“Ah, here are the Marquis and Bransdon,” as these were ushered into the room.

“Plenty of time yet,” said Avondale. “March is barely begun. We shall have some hot work about the Education, or Church and Education—which ever it is to be styled—Bill that Tintern introduces on Monday. If the Government survive that, the Budget and the general measure of Taxation will follow, and there the Ministry will receive the *coup de grâce*. I don’t think it would be advisable to open communications with the

Tories till the first Bill is settled. We hold the guiding strings. We can pull them, and make the other two parties knock each other about. If they destroy each other on the Education Bill, we step into office over their corpses. If not, we must join the Earl of Wigan in defeating the Budget; but we must act carefully, and absorb the Tories, not be absorbed by them. If Maitland has to resign, he would rather see Wigan than the Marquis, Premier."

"True," said the latter. "You have extraordinary discrimination, Avondale. I am certain that we can adopt no better course than what you have just pointed out."

"I am of the same opinion," added Bransdon. "I am also very anxious to see Avondale in Parliament."

"So am I," said Wharfedale, "and, now I remember it, I have just heard that Harwood, M.P. for Maesendean, is seriously ill. One, of course, cannot hope for his death, but it might easily occur—he is up in years, and has been rather a fast man in his earlier days—and, if so, Avondale could have that seat. Myself and the Carlton

family own most of the town. You know the place, Avondale; you went there once in the autumn."

"What do you think of Softhead as Solicitor-General?" asked Bransdon.

"I imagine you can form as good an opinion as myself," replied FitzHenry, laughing.

The others laughed too, for Sir Greenham had come out particularly strong on International Law, in the debate about the Schlumpg, &c., treaty, and had very condescendingly patronised Bransdon for his travels, and for the knowledge he had thus acquired of foreign countries, and their legislation.

"Bother him!" exclaimed Bransdon; "he is a cad, or he would not in that way have paraded his pet notions. And the House is scarcely the place for a fellow to spout Wheaton and Grotius—give members the references, and they can turn them up in the library."

But the work, the whirl of affairs, the excitement, and, above all, his own gnawing feelings with regard to Florence Vryne, and the bitter thoughts of the past, and of the future that might

have been, but could not now be—his feelings and thoughts which were rendered doubly gnawing, and painful, by the fact that he could not mention them even to Wyversley, or Stuart Jardine—were rapidly undermining Avondale's health. Sir Charles Popworth, upon whom he frequently called, noticed it, and cautioned him. So did Mrs. Jardine—

“You are doing too much, Walter—you will get ill.”

“Oh, no. It is only just at the present moment a little more exertion than usual.”

“Better run over with me to Rome for the Easter week,” said Stansville. “Ferne—he is a Lyddonshire man, do you know him?—is there, or, rather, will be there at Easter, he is at Mentone now. He has sent me an invite. He is a nice fellow, Ferne. He is going to marry a Miss Vryne, also from your neighbourhood. He is in raptures over her—I had a note from him this morning.”

The speaker little knew the agony he was causing; but Stuart Jardine did, for, though Avondale's conduct was perfectly inexplicable to

him, yet he was assured that he took more than common interest in Miss Vryne. He hastened to change the conversation, but hit on a subject not over savoury to Avondale—

“Did you see, mater, a brief notice in this morning’s ‘Constitutional’ of the death of Killarney’s aunt?”

“No. I was not aware he had an aunt—when did it occur?”

“Yesterday afternoon.”

“Does it improve Killarney’s fortune at all?”

“I don’t know.”

“I think so,” said Mr. Jardine. “I heard one day, from Lady Wharfedale, I believe, that Miss Dollmore, under her late brother’s will, received a life interest of £2,000 a year, which, of course, will now revert to Killarney, more’s the pity; and, besides, she has always been very saving, and has property of her own.”

CHAPTER III.

MR. HARWOOD succumbed to his disease, and paid the debt of nature. The Marquis immediately gave Avondale an introduction to his agents and solicitors at Maesendean, whom he directed to assist him with their own private influence but not, in any way, to bring his own name forward—he disliked coercion, and now, least of all, could either he or his chief associates compromise themselves by any act out of which political capital could be made by their opponents. Stanley Carlton, however, was not so punctilious. He was overjoyed to think that he could render Avondale any service, and he unhesitatingly placed his own name—he, of course, could not place his father's—on the committee formed to secure Avondale's election. Two other candidates appeared—Charlton, a large brewer, one of the

Common Council, in the Liberal interest, "to free the town from aristocratic domineering;" and Colonel Graham, in the Conservative interest, in the intention equally benevolent "of rescuing the ancient historic borough from the oppression exercised over it by the Liberals."

"I hope you will be successful," said Lady Wharfedale. "But, of course, you will—such a genius as yourself, so favoured of the fates, cannot know defeat."

"I must not flatter myself too much; I was defeated at Waterbridge."

"But there are not two Waterbridges in England."

"There are, however, some Radicals at Maesendean," observed Ravenshurst; "and you can never be sure of them—they might, out of malice, join Colonel Graham, or Charlton may divide the Liberal voters."

"Radicals are a general nuisance," said Avondale, "and, indeed, something more. You may fairly say '*tres populares, duo stulti, duo nebulones, triaque portenta.*'"

"Oh, pity me," exclaimed the Marchioness,

putting her fingers on her ears. "Such gibberish! has it any meaning?"

"A little," replied Ravenshurst, laughing. "'Three democrats, two fools, two rogues, and all three monsters to be looked at from a distance.'"

"Avondale is not far wrong," said the Duke of Strathclyde, "the probability being that the third one will be both a fool and rogue."

"The probability? The certainty you mean, on Avondale's reasoning," said Ravenshurst.

"We must thank Carlton for the activity he is showing," observed Wharfedale. "I am quite surprised at it. I wish Brayclift could be brought round, too, but there is no chance."

"None whatever," said Avondale. "His whole fortune is staked on the next Derby, and I fear the morrow of the race will see him a ruined man."

"Wyversley owes you much," continued the Marchioness. "He is altogether changed, and his mother is coming up soon, and she will re-open Walton House in something like its former grandeur."

Avondale was glad to hear this, but the thanks were not entirely due to him, though he could not deny them. The Marquis knew a little of Wyversley's habits, but he had no time to make close enquiries. Besides, the young Earl had almost got rid of his old associates, and was paying considerable attention to his duties as a peer; and, therefore, Wharfedale, who had heard some of the reports as to Wyversley's infatuation for Auricoma, little suspected the depth of that infatuation. He deemed it a boyish flame, which would soon burn out, and would become altogether extinguished, when Wyversley should meet the being appointed him by fate. But it was no boyish flame, as Avondale could easily have told him. It was a strong, clear fire, which could be put out only by means of some great catastrophe scattering its embers far and wide, or by the removal of the fuel that fed it—not by its own weakness. Avondale was greatly concerned for his friend. He saw Wyversley daily approaching nearer the calamity, for averting which no means appeared. He was suffering enough on his own account—the information incidentally given him

a week before, by Stansville, had completed the measure of misery—but he could still spare regrets for Wyversley's folly.

"I am sorry, however," said Ravenshurst, "that my sister won't come up this season, or if she does, only for a few days. She is tired of society, she says, and is going in strongly for Sunday schools and old women's clubs."

"I am very sorry," said Lady Wharfedale. "I hope she will change her mind; perhaps she may, when she hears of Lady Wyversley's intention."

"I hope so, but I fear she won't. You know last year she came up late, after Easter, and had almost determined to stay away altogether."

Could Ravenshurst have guessed the thoughts of one of his hearers he would not have spoken quite so coolly. Go where Avondale would it seemed as though he must be reminded of his passion and its consequences. He preserved an unchanged countenance, but apparently the pallor increased, for Lady Wharfedale, a few minutes afterwards, observed—

“You are not well, Mr. Avondale. Do you see how white he is looking, Ralph?”

“Yes, my dear, and I have begged him not to work so hard. You must find out some young lady for him to act as a counter attraction to politics; do you know any one likely to suit?”—this in a pleasant tone of banter.

“No one, unless—” and with lightning speed there flashed through her mind a faint suspicion which caused her to hesitate. Then she continued, “what would you say to one of the Misses Simpkins, Mr. Avondale?”

There was a laugh.

“That would be hard lines on him,” said Wharfedale. “You must stay a week at Maesendean to recruit yourself, Avondale.”

“A pretty way to recruit himself,” said Strathclyde, “bothering about a contested election.”

Next morning Avondale left for Maesendean; it had been thought best that he should lose no time in opening his canvass. It was his birthday. He received two presents, both directed in female handwriting. One was from his sister, the other was not. It was a small bunch of

violets enclosed in a slip of paper, inscribed,

“Walter Avondale, M.P. for Maesendean,

“Forget—be happy, but not faithful
True to thine ownself, not to other.”

He recognised the writing, the gift, the sentiments. The sender would release him from his oaths, but what use now? And would the release sweeten the reflection that he had gained the affections of her whom he had ceased to love?

Jardine accompanied him to Maesendean, as would Wyversley but for the breach of privilege; Stanley Carlton was already there, putting forth a wonderful amount of energy. They stayed there some days, but, of course, called no meeting, published no address till after the burial of Mr. Harwood. Then one or two assemblies, and a little canvassing enabled them to decide that Avondale would certainly be elected if the other two candidates did not coalesce.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Education Bill was introduced on the 6th March, nominally by Lord Tintern, really by Mr. Rowe, who was much better acquainted with the subject than his lordship, and who would have been a far abler Minister of Education than of finance. "Church and Education" Avondale preferred to style it, and this was the better designation, for it was a most heterogeneous measure

"That shape had none,
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
For each seemed either."

By this extract Bransdon fitly characterised it on the second reading. It dealt with Church as well as with Education, and it was impossible to determine which was the substance, which the shadow, whether the intent were to bring home

instruction through the agency of religion, or *vice versâ*, to the masses of the people ; whether it was an insidious attempt to raise the *status* of Dissent or destroy that of Episcopacy. Bransdon sought an explanation of the medley by referring the draft of the Bill to the diverse tendencies of the two gentlemen who took it in charge, to Rowe's freethinking and Tintern's orthodoxy, spiced by Muddler's desire—who, by the by, would put a word in everywhere, and being cousin or brother-in-law to about a dozen M.P.'s, could back up his request pretty strongly—by his desire that “hinfants should 'ave han hopportunity hof hacquiring hat han hearly hage han helementary huseful heducation.”

The first reading was assented to on the 10th March.

That afternoon there was, at Mr. Jardine's, the first open muster of his party. Close upon a hundred attended. Jardine said a few words ; he was tacitly recognised as their leader in the Commons. Then, at greater length, spoke Herbert Williams upon the defects of the measure as regarded its direct object, Education ; and Sir

Edward Pilgrim, who was loudly cheered, as regarded the indirect object, the relation of the Church to the State and to Nonconformists. Three or four others of the general assembly next put forth their ideas ; then Exmoor followed, expressing his opinion that if the Bill survived to Committee ("it won't, it won't," was shouted) it must be greatly modified ; and Wharfedale briefly and pointedly summed up the debate.

The second reading was appointed for the 22nd. Meantime all parties braced themselves for the struggle ; the Ministry fully awakened to their danger—the Tories once more catching a glimpse of the Treasury benches, and of themselves seated thereon—and Wharfedale's adherents completely alive to the difficulties of their position, to the risk they were under of losing the fruit of all their exertions by allowing Wigan and the Conservatives to slip in and occupy the seats vacated by Maitland and his section.

Negotiations and intrigues became the order of the day. The Earl of Wigan tried to win over Jardine, whose opinions and his own were one on the mode of governing our Colonies, and

Sir Henry Kerr, in favour of whom Lord Wyre, his son, offered to waive his pretensions to the Presidency of the Indian Board ; and the Duke of Beaulieu, another prominent Tory, tried the same with Exmoor ; but neither accomplished more than the betraying the hopes and fears of his own side.

On the other hand, though Maitland shut himself up in gloomy grandeur, Rowe opened communications with his old associate, Jardine, giving him the choice of either the Home or the Colonial Office, and Jardine returned the compliment by telling Rowe that on the change of Government he should be rejoiced to see him retaining his post as Finance Minister. Bayswater, too, laboured to secure Bransdon, who “preferred the Foreign Office to the Irish Secretaryship,” and FitzHenry—“we will turn going Claybourne ; make him a Commissioner in Bankruptcy.”

“It would suit him well, but I have an innate horror of serving with Greenham Softhead.”

“You would be Attorney, of course, and if Softhead objects, we will make him a Master in

Chancery, or send him to one of the County Courts."

"It would be more than he is worth, but I could not desert Sir Edward."

"He could take the Woolsack; Brentwood is getting old."

"Then, besides, I have a slight objection to the Premier," which objection, unfortunately, could not be got over, though undoubtedly had Bayswater been endued with the gift of prescience, he would, when Wharfedale resigned, have resigned with him.

Not alone the political world, but the whole of England as well, was in a state of commotion. Merchants talked in the same breath, of leather and Dissenters, tea and school boards, wool and Church government, guano and education. Bankers asked Mr. Blank one minute, "if he were aware how short his account was running?" and the next, "could he form any idea of the actual force of the new party?" Brokers confused scrip, and stock, and mining shares with politics, just as in the Bill, religious and educational clauses were mingled in inextricable chaos.

The excitement increased as the debate on the second reading proceeded. It became manifest to all, and to none more clearly than the leaders of the three sections, that the division would determine the fate of the Cabinet, and that that division would itself be determined by the action of the Wharfedale party.

Avondale returned from Maesendean on Lady Day. On the 28th the debate was, after seven hours' talking, adjourned till the following Monday, on the motion of Exmoor, Jardine having also to speak. The next evening Avondale dined with Jardine.

"You have a good chance, Walter, according to what all three of you say," observed his host.

"I believe so, if Charlton and Graham don't coalesce."

"Even if they did, you would beat them," said Wyversley. "You have promises from nearly half the voters."

CHAPTER V.

IN the drawing room Avondale was glad to see Wyversley seat himself by Mary Jardine ; he noticed the slight colour that rose to that young lady's cheek as she made way for him. He hoped, indeed against hoping, that a similar feeling might be aroused in Wyversley's breast to that which had evidently been aroused in Miss Mary's. He had, as I have already mentioned, thrown the two together as often as possible. Mr. and Mrs. Jardine liked the good nature and the generous disposition of the young nobleman ; they were pleased to see him labouring with Avondale, and to have him a visitor at their house, though they were utterly guiltless of ulterior designs ; they had no idea that Polly, so vivacious and active, who chaffed every one and laughed at sentiment, could by any possibility lose her heart on an intercourse of a few months

—they did not suspect the truth now, and Avondale was uncertain whether even Alison, the eldest daughter did, she being so much engaged with her charities and with her own little romance.

“You must be a great magician, Mr. Avondale,” said Mrs. Jardine. “You have metamorphosed Stuart and Mr. Carlton. I could scarcely recognise either.”

“Say rather some one else has metamorphosed them,” said Alison with a smile. “I had a letter from Edith this morning—don’t blush, Master Stuart. I was only going to observe that she did not even thank you for all the zeal you were displaying in her brother’s cause—perhaps, indeed, she was not even aware of it.”

Avondale, too, had had a letter from Edith, in which she told him she had heard from Alice Popworth that Sir Arthur Fernie was at Mentone with Mr. Vrynné, and was to marry Florence in the summer. She besought him most earnestly to tell her what was the obstacle, and allow her to write to Florence, or to write himself to Mr. Vrynné before it was too late.

“She loves you, dear Walter, indeed she does; and you did love her. What is it that is now separating your souls? If it is any fault of yours don’t be too proud or too ashamed to confess it—don’t, don’t, my brother. Mr. Vryune always wished for the marriage. So does papa, and he is very much fretting about it. So did Florence; it was her sole desire. But if you give no sign she cannot now withdraw. Her self-respect will prevent her. She cannot allow the whole county to say that she offered herself to you and you refused her. Oh, Walter darling, don’t consign her and yourself to a life of wretchedness.”

The appeal went home to Avondale. Nevertheless, despite the agony he was enduring, despite the misery before him, he could not resolve to ask Clare Campion to release him. The Avondales had ever been true to their promise—probably there was a spice of perversity and obstinacy in their nature—and he, durst he be the first to make oaths and break them, to confess himself false, forsworn, base? Clare Campion had a day or two ago told him to forget; but it was her reason, not heart, which spoke,

for she had asked him to think of her for a year, and not half of it had elapsed. He would wait the year, come what might, and then pray her forgiveness.

“Ah, that explains matters,” said Mrs. Jardine, smiling, as she replied to her daughter’s observation. “Perhaps a similar explanation would apply to Mr. Carlton.”

“It would not; Carlton is a muff,” asserted Stuart somewhat unreasonably.

“Don’t be absurd or ungenerous, Stuart,” said his mother. “Nor vicious,” added his sister.

Avondale laughed, but Mrs. Jardine noticed how wearily. “You are unwell, Walter. I know you are, I am anxious about you, I shall write to your sister.”

“No need, thank you,” said Avondale. “As soon as the election is over and we learn the result of Monday’s division, I shall take it easier.”

“I hope so, but I do not see how that is to be brought about. If you are in office the cares and troubles would harass you quite as much.

However, no doubt that just at present you have more than a usual amount of work."

"At least you must not get knocked up before next Thursday," said Stuart. "Half London will be at Lady Wyversley's first ball, and if you the—the—what shall I say?"

"Incomparable," suggested Mrs. Bransdon.

"Yes—incomparable, are absent; it would inflict the bitterest disappointment on all the young ladies who are dying to make your acquaintance."

"Dying in more senses than one," added Mrs. Bransdon. "Have you noticed that Kate Vandeleur's hair has resumed its natural tint?"

"Yes," said Mr. Jardine, "the fair damsel's locks have recently changed from yellow to nearly black. I was rather amused at the change. I am rather surprised that Sinclair cares a bit for her now; he must have heard of her proceedings."

"He does care, and that very much, or he would not have exchanged into the regiment that has come home, as such an arrangement is

always expensive; and he has persuaded his father to permit the marriage."

"Kate may congratulate her good fortune in escaping Killarney," said Mrs. Bransdon.

Avondale had left them to say a few words to Mary Jardine about the ball.

"Killarney is a thorough *roué*," observed Jardine.

"He is a thorough cad, I believe," said Wyversley.

"Is he not to be married soon?" asked Mrs. Bransdon.

"I believe so," replied Mrs. Jardine. "Miss Dawson has returned from the South of France, where she has spent the winter. I saw her last Tuesday in the park."

"It is lucky for Avondale," said her husband, in a low tone, "that he escaped her, though he did not at first take kindly to it."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Bransdon, surprised, "did Miss Dawson refuse Avondale for Killarney?"

"Something very like it."

"Why the girl must be mad."

“I am of the same opinion,” said Mrs. Jardine.

“It is regularly a case of ‘*quem Deus vult*,’” added Mrs. Bransdon. “But there is no accounting for tastes.”

CHAPTER VI.

MONDAY came. The proceedings of the Wharfedale followers were settled, chiefly according to Avondale's counsel. The heads of the party met at Wharfedale House, and agreed, when the division should be taken, to withdraw from the House, and leave Tories and Maitlandites to fight the battle out. Some objections were made to this course, but Avondale's reasoning overruled them.

“By so doing we shall not play into the hands of the Earl of Wigan. Probably not over 200 Liberals will be left, and certainly not 250 Tories. Our followers won't be much under 200. This, taken with the fact that we are Liberals, and in opposition, may not impossibly induce her Majesty to send for the Marquis of Wharfedale.”

This arrangement was laid before a general

assembly of them, convened an hour later. No one could think of a better proposition.

The evening came—a crowded, excited House. Exmoor commenced, Rowe followed; less important members continued the debate; Jardine, Englander, Maitland concluded it. Englander, with his usual cool assumption, assumed all the credit of originating the opposition. The Speaker put the question, and the Wharfedale party, pursuant to their agreement, withdrew amid a tempest of cheers and counter cheers. As the last of them filed out, it became patent to all who remained, and to the Peers and strangers present, how the voting would result. Tories and Liberals went to their respective lobbies—then all returned; and the numbers were handed in by the Tory teller—for the Government, 224; against 244. The cheers and groans were renewed uproariously. After some minutes, with eyes flashing, and hands clenched, and in tones that trembled with rage, Mr. Maitland moved an adjournment till Thursday.

No need to speak of the satisfaction of the Marquis and his friends.

“It is owing almost entirely to you, Avondale,” said the Marquis. “I am sorry Lady Wharfedale is not here to offer you her congratulations, too. She was summoned to Egremont this afternoon by the sudden illness of the housekeeper, to whom she is much attached. And you say you are going away to-morrow—you must certainly be back before Thursday.”

“Yes, most decidedly.”

They parted. Killarney was standing by. A sneer curled Avondale’s lip as he recognised him in his paint; a savage and a meaning gleam shot from Killarney’s dull eyes, and he observed the sneer.

CHAPTER VII.

To explain the cause of Avondale's journey to Lyddonshire, we must go back somewhat. We have said that Avondale went to Clair Street somewhat oftener than he ought to have done. His chief incentive was to escape the dulness and the growing regret that would seize upon him during his long winter evenings. The Maison d'Or was ever well attended, though its attendance was not of a peculiarly high or intellectual character—ever brilliant, though its brilliancy was tinsel and false glare.

But Avondale was perfectly content not to look below the surface; he sought company, life, movement, he dreaded solitude and rest; and he found what he sought, or, at least, a substitute for it, at the Maison d'Or.

Brayclift and his Grace of Glenlivat were often there, but the first's income now was merely

what his mother allowed him out of her life-interest of £5,000 a-year, and the latter would, ere the season closed, be reduced to the same, or rather to a worse predicament—he had no mother to fall back upon, and when his own estates were gone, all would be gone. Many another cadet of good family was there, some, like these two, wilfully wasting their patrimony; others, like Avondale, wasting merely their odd moments and odd coppers. The son of the millionaire *parvenu* was there—Hardman, whose father was promised a baronetcy if the Tories got into power—Higgins, whose grandsire had kept the little marine store shop in Walworth Street, City, which his son, now Sir Thomas and an Alderman, and a resident in Eaton Square, had transformed into the immense warehouse of Higgins and Co.—Dobson, who never had a grandsire, whose father's history went back no farther than the time when he was promoted from a crossing sweeper to be an errand boy at Messrs. Scraper, Stingy, Saveup, and Co's.—*et hoc omne genus*. And with them were not a few who eked out a subsistence by cringing to them, and flattering

their follies, as never does menial flatter and cringe to the most exacting master.

Two of the most regular visitors were Talbot and Captain Dawson. The former was developing his bad points more and more, to the exclusion of his good ones. He was not abandoning himself to headlong dissipation—he was too careful of his money to squander it on others, though he might on himself. He was rapidly becoming a complete *roué*, in the worst sense of the word—mean, cunning, sensual, and contriving to get the fullest amount of pleasure, *i.e.*, brute enjoyment, with the least expenditure of cash; and it was very strange that Avondale should have consented to associate with him on any terms. But few saw him in his true colours—he was, perhaps, a little bit coarse, but that could be attributed to the exuberance of animal spirits.

Captain Dawson was, as the reader knows, the cousin of Miss Dawson. There was much of Talbot about him; much of his coarseness and vulgarity, more of his prudence and cunning; and, what the other was almost devoid of, considerable personal courage. He disliked Avon-

dale, why, it would be difficult to say, and the feeling was mutual. He hated Wyversley, because that nobleman, deeming him a cad, simply ignored his presence, and because Auricomma had refused him admittance at Lilybank.

Wyversley several times remonstrated with Avondale for going to Clair Street at all, and especially with having anything to do with either of these two. It was a strange inversion of affairs, Telemachus lecturing Mentor.

“ You really should not, Walter, ever visit the place. It may compromise you seriously.”

“ Oh, no, I have no fear of that. As soon as the winter is over I shall give it up.”

“ Why not at once ? ”

“ Because I get ennuyed out of my life during the long evenings.”

“ But that ought not to be, with your prospects and hopes. You are looking miserably out of sorts, but I don't think it can be simply the work you are doing. Is there any hidden trouble? Anything in which I could be of the slightest service to you ? ”

“No, nothing particular. I dare say I shall pitch on my feet all right some day.”

Avondale could not tell his friend his secret grief; nor would he take his advice. He still went to the *Maison d'Or*. He could beat any one there at billiards—Stansville was, perhaps, his nearest match—but he was not so successful at cards. He was a good player, but he almost invariably lost, never matter what the game, when Wyversley or Talbot was his partner, though he very generally won against these. He was inclined to suspect cheating, but neither himself nor Stansville could detect any unfairness or juggling.

“A mere coincidence, I suppose,” muttered Stansville.

“A remarkable coincidence,” said Stuart Jardine, who occasionally accompanied them.

So matters went on till the death of Mr. Harwood.

“Now, Walter,” said Wyversley, “you must shut up your account with Clair Street.”

“I suppose so, but I wish I could fairly make out this mystery about the play.”

“Pooh, don’t trouble yourself about that. How is it it always rains when the wind is from the West?”

“Because, my dear fellow,” replied Avondale, smiling, “that wind, as you are well aware—that particular wind comes over a large track of ocean. Your example does not bear out its implied conclusion. There is cause and effect in it—do not the same exist in the other case?”

“Well, even if you did find the cause, *qu’importe?* You could not prosecute the rogue; it would be like fighting a chimney sweep. But seriously, you must not go to this hell any more. It is getting rumoured about. Exmoor this morning mentioned it to me very significantly. Of course he knows well enough about my little weakness, but he meant much more than he said when he told me. ‘Wyversley, you are, I hear, getting a regular gambler, quite a sharper in fact; and Avondale too—but I presume his name is by mistake muddled up with yours. Do you always win or always lose, Wyversley?’”

“He would imply that the report is I am a swindler,” exclaimed Avondale, greatly excited.

“I will find out the cause of what you style a coincidence.”

“You cannot. Don’t go there again, Walter.”

But Avondale would go, and did go the night after his return from Maesendean. Delancourt accompanied him; and again he and Wyversley and he and Talbot lost.

“Strange; but I am convinced it is nothing more,” said Stansville.

“So it may be or not,” added Wyversley; “but I have seen the last of the place.”

“No—come with me once more,” said Avondale. “Next Saturday—the Saturday before the division. I must then, perforce, abandon Clair Street.”

So they went for the last time; but Avondale could not find out the mystery, if any there were. Dawson and another fellow, a hanger-on of the place, were opposed to him and Talbot. He had been drinking a little; so had Dawson. He got excited as he lost, as did Dawson as he won. High words arose.

“Dear me,” exclaimed Dawson, sneeringly,

“Mr. Avondale cannot really be such a genius as ever to ensure success.”

“Success, at least a fair proportion of success, if there were nothing underhand,” broke out Avondale.

“Underhand; on which side? Rather remarkable—I wonder it has not been observed—that you always lose with, and win against, your darling associate, Wyversley, and my friend, Talbot.”

“What would you insinuate? Speak out, that I may give the lie to it.”

“Nothing, nothing whatever. I only fancy some people’s friendship may be purchased a trifle too dearly.”

“You are insinuating, Dawson, what cowards like you are afraid to say.”

“Oh, no, not afraid, sir; I can protect myself, though my father found it difficult to do the like for himself on one memorable occasion some few years back.”

The taunt did its work. Avondale had faintly heard of a fight or a quarrel between his father and Mr. Dawson, in which the latter was very

roughly handled, and even uglier rumours of attempted murder had reached his ears.

“Liar!” he shouted, springing forward, intending to fell the reviler; but Delancourt, Wyversley, and Jardine held him, while others—for many had crowded round to hear the altercation—did the same for his opponent.

“Let him come,” hissed Dawson as furious as himself. “Let him come, the modern Crichton, whose sense of honour is so nice that he can coolly lure his friends on and get them to lose heaps of money, and then say that others cheat. He is the best card player here, and yet he always loses when his partner is a man who can pay—there’s honesty for you; and then he talks of underhand dealing—there’s morality. Let him come. We are equally matched. There’s plenty here to watch, and it’s light. My father was in weak health when he was attacked, and it was in a dark lane at night, with nobody near. Who’s the rogue, the swindler, but yourself? No wonder you are so skilful at politics when you favour us with such specimens of your craft here.”

Thus Dawson went on, while Avondale raved in his friends' hands, to get at him. Those that were there assured him they did not believe a word of Dawson's assertions, he being probably drunk. His friends saw him home, and he resolved to go to Lyddonshire on Tuesday morning, and get an explanation from his father of the charge made by Dawson. A miserable Sunday and Monday he spent, for he almost thought that as he passed through the streets men pointed him out as being the knave Dawson had declared him. Wyversley saw him Monday morning.

“Don't fret about this, Walter.”

“Dawson has blackened my character.”

“No one believes him. Even if any did, it would be merely the frequenters of Clair Street, and their belief won't affect you in the eyes of society. Run down and see your governor, there's no harm in that; but be sure to be back by Thursday. I shall be dreadfully annoyed, and my mother will be much grieved if you are absent from the ball. We are to have such a lot of people, and you will be looked upon as the hero of the hour—you must be there, my dear

fellow. Meanwhile think no more about Dawson than I do."

But he could not help thinking about him, and about his damning accusations, and thus a further weight was added to the load of trouble weighing upon him.

Avondale returned to his chambers in the early morning of Tuesday, after the division, with the intention of having a few hours sleep, and leaving by the first fast train.

On his table was a telegram from his sister, dated seven o'clock the previous evening :—

"Papa badly hurt, and is insensible—fallen off his horse—come at once."

This took from Avondale all possibility for sleep. Between him and his father existed a strong affection which, under any circumstances, would have rendered their eternal parting most painful. Now was added to that grief the thought that his father might be dead before he reached him—before he could obtain any explanation or refutation of Dawson's statements.

His state of mind cannot be described, as he waited while the minutes slowly passed by, till

six o'clock, when he took the first train for Lyddonshire. He reached Newbury by ten o'clock, and drove thence to Avondale Hall. Arrived there, his father he found in bed, but not dangerously hurt. His horse had stumbled, caught another foot in a hole, and then rolled over, pitching Mr. Avondale some yards, who had fallen on his back and head. He remained insensible till near midnight, but no bones were broken, and the doctors predicted that, thanks to his strong constitution and temperate habits, a short week would see him out of his room again.

His son's arrival gave him great pleasure, and he went to sleep for a few hours, and woke up quite refreshed, so much so that Walter Avondale, anxious to get back to town the next day, ventured to mention to him the occurrence at Clare Street, and to ask him, if strong enough, to let him know exactly what Dawson referred to.

Mr. Avondale's recital cleared up the mystery, and put his son's mind somewhat at rest. Briefly, it amounted to this—

“Many years since, Dawson's father occupied Thorpe farm. His landlord allowed him to shoot

the ground game, and he took advantage of the liberty by shooting mine, and even poaching in the preserves whenever no one was about. I warned him several times and summoned him once, but he got off. He retaliated by assisting three or four of the biggest poachers in the neighbourhood, and, finally, shooting two of my retrievers, and poisoning others of the dogs. I had no proof of this, but it was currently reported in the neighbourhood, and Dawson, when slightly drunk, more than once boasted of it at the village public. The death of my dogs made me perfectly savage, and I rashly told my men that if ever I caught Dawson on my grounds I would shoot him. A few days afterwards, about 9 o'clock one evening in June, I was going round the west plantation, when I heard some shots. We hurried in the direction, and saw two men in the dusk running away. I went after one, who seemed like Dawson, the keeper after the other. I soon gained on my man. He rushed through a hedge, I close behind, with a double barrel, one barrel loaded, which caught among the thorns, and went off.

The bank was steep the other side—Dawson had fallen down, and before he could be off again I was upon him. He raised his gun to strike me with it, but I was too quick for him, and knocked him down, and, as he fell, his gun went off, lodging the contents in his side. He was taken home, and died in the night. His brother, the present man, then a little trader, came down—declared that I had murdered him—employed a solicitor at the coroner's inquest, and did his utmost to get me convicted, but the jury, and I believe everybody in Lyddonshire, were satisfied as to how the affair had happened. That is one, and the chief reason, why Dawson and I are not, and can never be, even acquaintances."

This was ample explanation for Walter—so it would be for his intimate friends—but he could not persuade himself that Dawson might not be able, to others of his acquaintances (and there were plenty who were envious of him) to put a different view upon it, and to make them sceptical of its truth.

As it was finished, a telegram arrived, which added to his entanglements, and made him say

he must return to town by the first train next day. It ran—

“From Wyversley, Walton House, Durham Square, London, to W. Avondale, Avondale, Lyddonshire.

“Mischief afloat—Wharfedale greatly enraged, why, I know not—return at once—the party will else break up.”

I have mentioned that Killarney saw on Monday evening, or rather Tuesday morning, Wharfedale and Avondale part at the Houses of Parliament, and heard the latter say he was going from town that day. In the evening his lordship called on the Marquis, the result of which call was that Wharfedale conceived a sudden and most intense hatred of Avondale, the result of which change of feeling was the above telegram.

CHAPTER VIII.

AVONDALE slept little that night. What could the message refer to? What mischief was afloat? He racked his brain again and again, but could give himself only one answer, and of that answer Lady Campion was the burthen. By some means his insane passion must have been brought to light. There could be nothing else which would have estranged the Marquis. This, this alone, must be the cause. How often he cursed his folly! His prospects blighted, his hopes utterly dashed, the cup of success torn from his very lips. All owing to a woman—to his own impetuous feeling—and against those very feelings he had been earnestly cautioned. That he, whose tact and foresight had contributed so much to the impending downfall of the Ministry, to the change of the Government of a mighty empire, should lose the fruit of all his patience, and determination, and *finesse*, by a few weeks', a moment's,

yielding to a pure infatuation—that he whose head was so clear, and his intellect so penetrating, should have been unable to control the heart—the thought was maddening. He could not lie still.

He got up and paced the room in an agony of remorse and vexation. His breast was torn by conflicting, though intermingling, currents. Love for Florence Vrynne was one. The more clearly he recognised their eternal separation, the more bitter and poignant became his grief. Ambition, perhaps, predominated, but it was quite impossible to compare the two. He could have replaced Miss Vrynne's image by the splendid future that had been gradually unfolding before him, but now this resource was removed, and nothing remained for his mind to feed on but self-reproach. The world would point to him with sneers and scorn. His brain seemed on fire—he grew almost beside himself. It may appear strange that he should have allowed one overpowering idea to have such complete mastery over him. But so it was. At last, after some hours' tossing, the tempest that agitated him

sank down, and about four o'clock he fell into an unquiet slumber.

He woke up much calmer at seven, snatched a hurried breakfast, and drove to Newbury to catch the 9.30 express for London. The motion of the train soothed him and restored his mind to its equilibrium. He could reason with himself more coherently. Might he not last night have too hastily drawn a conclusion from the telegram. Such notices are necessarily composed very briefly. Had not this very briefness been one cause of the great effect it had produced on him? Had not its sudden arrival, immediately after his father's narrative, given it an unreal importance? Perhaps other causes, altogether different, had acted on the Marquis—perhaps all his apprehensions were ungrounded, arising solely from a guilty conscience. This, however, could scarcely be; something must be wrong. Was Clare Campion the cause? His conduct in reference to her had, doubtless, been very reprehensible. They both had broken through the regulations of society and the ordinances of morality, but was there not much, very much, excuse? For his

own fault he was prepared to atone in the only manner possible, should opportunity be offered. His passion had died out, passed by rather, as an April cloud flits across the sky; but all his sympathy for the woman remained. If it were this which had aroused the anger of the Marquis, he would at least palliate his error, though he could not attempt to defend it.

And if excuse and palliation were refused, he would not yield without a struggle. He had built up one party—he would build up another, even if the task required years for its accomplishment. But could there be no other cause? The existing Ministry, or some of its members, would be rejoiced to see a split in their opponents' camp; and they probably would hesitate at little short of actual treachery and fraud to accomplish such an object. Might they not have contrived some means of doing so? Then again, Killarney owed him no good-will. Would not he be delighted with the chance, should it be presented him, of poisoning the ear of the Marquis? Conjecture after conjecture thus passed through his mind till he arrived in the metropolis.

After taking his luggage to Granston Street, he went at once to the Earl of Wyversley's. He was at home and at lunch ; his countenance was serious above its wont.

"I am glad you have lost no time, Walter. I fear my message has startled you somewhat—you appear haggard."

"Very probably. You know, I have been working almost too hard lately, and my mind has been on the stretch for three days. What is up? Let me hear it all."

"I am afraid I cannot give you much information. Sit down first, and take some refreshment. I dare say you have eaten nothing to-day."

"Not much. I am too eager to learn anything you have to tell me to feel hunger now. Pray let me hear it at once, Wyversley."

"Well, this is all I know. Yesterday Ravenshurst was lunching here—why, what ails you, my dear fellow?"

At the name Avondale had started, shaking the table violently.

"Nothing—only my head is throbbing, and every now and then a sharp pain shoots through it. Go on."

He half filled his tumbler with brandy, and drained it.

“That won’t improve the headache, Walter,” expostulated his friend. “You had much better lie down and take a cooling draught. Ravenshurst was here, I said. When I came into the room I noticed that both my mother and he were unusually solemn. During the meal few remarks were hazarded. Towards the close I chanced to mention your name in connection with the election at Maesendean. Ravenshurst had been looking very gloomy, and he now spoke in a most sneering tone.

“‘I wish Mr. Walter Avondale all the success he deserves.’

“‘So do I most unfeignedly,’ I said. ‘But, excuse me, Ravenshurst, your manner plainly belies your words.’

“‘Not unlikely. I may have caught it from your intimate friend, little as has been the communication between us.’

“‘What in the world do you mean?’ I exclaimed, rather hotly, I dare say.

“‘Don’t speak quite so loud, Reginald—you have not caught that from your *confrère*—ill

manners and duplicity are evidently not connected. I mean simply this, that this plausible young gentleman has taken advantage of his intimacy with certain families to inflict on one of them a deadly outrage, that immaculate as he may be, he has not been content simply to employ his friends for his own political aggrandisement, but has also filled up his leisure moments by cultivating the virtues of a Don Juan—and with great success. I might add that I have also just heard he has been your chief instructor in cards and dice, and the other amiable weaknesses to which you have given way.’

“‘You may add,’ I retorted, ‘that your informant is a consummate liar.’

“‘Allow me to thank you on his behalf. I will add also, that the Marquis of Wharfedale will at least save himself from the chance of again suffering from Mr. Avondale a repetition of the gross outrage which that honourable individual, that very spotless and promising genius, has offered him, by breaking off all further connection with him.’

“Pardon me, Walter, I am simply repeating his

words—I am as truly grieved at the terrible insinuations as you are.”

“Never mind me—continue,” spoke his hearer in a hollow, smothered tone.

“He went on,—‘last night the Marquis sent down instructions to his agent at Maesendean to withdraw all support from his nominee, and to inform the tenants, they were to use their own free will.’

“‘An abominable shame,’ I said.

“‘I don’t think so,’ replied my mother, ‘you are not aware of all the facts, Reginald.’

“‘What are the facts then?’ I demanded. Further reply Ravenshurst refused.

“I left the table at once after Ravenshurst, and hastened to Wharfedale House. The Marquis was not at home, and did not, in fact, return till near five o’clock. I told him my errand, and begged to be informed of the ground of your offence. Wharfedale was in a viler temper than Ravenshurst, and scowled frightfully as he listened to me. He gave me no information, but replied savagely—

“‘Lord Ravenshurst is perfectly correct. The

person with whom you have been so intimate, and in whom I have taken such interest, is a scoundrel of the deepest dye.'

"I remonstrated; he cut me short. 'Excuse me, Wyversley—the world says you have had so much experience in the crime of which this, this man—he would not pronounce your name—is accused, that probably you would not comprehend its full atrocity. Oblige me by letting the topic drop, now, and for ever.' Seeing I could get no further answer, I sent the telegram off directly."

Avondale had listened as in a dream to the latter part of the recital. Clare Campion was plainly in some way or other the source of the whole affair; but beyond this all was wrapped in obscurity—unless, and the mere idea struck like a cold chill through his frame, unless from some unaccountable cause it may be against the Marchioness, and not against her, that suspicion pointed. Yet this seemed altogether improbable. Between Wharfedale and his wife the most unbounded confidence existed—he could not, he dared not distrust her in the slightest degree.

But the expressions of Ravenshurst referred distinctly and unquestionably to an intrigue with a woman, and what construction could be put upon the words, "the Marquis will save himself from a repetition of the gross outrage," taken with the allusion in that nobleman's own reply to Wyversley? There seemed to be but one conclusion, and that conclusion caused him the bitterest agony.

As Wyversley ended, he arose. "I must see the Marquis immediately—he is under some horrid delusion."

"Yes, decidedly—it will be the best course. My mother is gone out, or perhaps she might give you some hint, though I regret that she, too, is prejudiced against you. The ball comes off this evening—you are, I know, invited—and she will, of course, return shortly. I have been expecting her every minute, but I don't think you should waste time by waiting."

They went to Wharfedale House. The Marquis was "not at home."

"What that means, I cannot determine," said Wyversley.

“ You must curb your impatience till to-morrow morning, I fear—you will be certain to secure him just after breakfast—or, stay—he will be at the ball to-night. We will seek him out there, and oblige him either to give you an interview in one of the rooms, or to name a convenient time. It is most important that matters should be cleared up as soon as possible. Do try to get cool, my dear fellow. You look perfectly ghastly. Shall we turn into the park ? ”

“ I would rather not. I have no wish to meet any acquaintance while in this state. Besides, the report of the split is doubtless already spread far and wide, and will afford the town some hours’ wonder and conversation. To have happened now, when everything is playing into one’s hands. To-day Maitland is to give his answer in the House ; perhaps at this very moment he is tendering his resignation to the Queen ; he went to Windsor this morning. Damnation ! I have made all the arrangements, worked up the Cabinet, and now at the very last moment all my exertion is stultified, and I am become a byword and a laughing stock. The

fiend himself must have invented the tale, and prepared people's minds for its reception."

"Walter, do not be so excited," expostulated Wyversley. "You are beside yourself; you will become crazed. Go back to your rooms and try to get two or three hours' sleep."

"I will; it is the best I can do till evening. I shall come to the ball, though if Wharfedale is not present shall not stay long."

CHAPTER IX.

ARRIVED at his rooms, Avondale was unable to compose himself. He felt convinced that Lady Wharfedale's good name was in danger of dishonour, and the thought caused him unutterable grief, while, for the Marquis himself, he was scarcely less concerned. Both had been most kind and considerate to him, they had received him on terms of the closest friendship; they had counselled, assisted, advanced him in every possible way; and for recompense he had returned, so one at least thought, the basest ingratitude. The hours dragged by very slowly. He would have called on the Jardines, but they might have heard of the report, and what explanation could he give them, or any one else, of it till he had seen the Marquis. He was most anxious to hear Maitland's speech, but dread of meeting any one he knew prevented his going

to the House. However, a late edition of the evening papers told him about eight o'clock that Maitland had resigned, and had recommended Her Majesty to send for the Earl of Wigan.

“Wigan and Englander and the Tories in office once more,” he exclaimed as he scanned the paragraph. “That is a nice stroke of policy on the part of Maitland ; but if Wharfedale will hear me, I trust we can foil his purpose. Wigan is too old ; he cannot last long, and if he were dead how would Wyre and Englander agree ? How will they agree in the Commons ? Why this party must, from internal disorder, break up in a week or two—that is, supposing a Cabinet can be by any chance formed out of it. But they cannot form one without help from us. Oh, if Wharfedale will only be true to himself and me.”

He dressed with more than customary care for the ball. He arrived at Walton House rather late, and the rooms were already well filled, a brilliant company having assembled to do honour to the Countess on her return to society. Avondale had been there some time, and had met many

acquaintances, though not either of those he was especially in quest of—the Marquis and Wyversley. He had not yet seen the Countess, for he instinctively hesitated to address her till he had first met Wharfedale; and he had not joined in any dance; it was impossible for him to attempt to assume a smiling countenance. While hesitating whether to remain or not, he came across Mrs. Jardine and Stuart.

“The very man,” exclaimed the latter. “My mother is somewhat overpowered with this hot room; could you, Walter, kindly take her to some cooler apartment? We were seeking the conservatory, but you know the way better than I. But, Walter, how unwell you look!”

“With pleasure,” replied Avondale.

“Wyversley’s study will be the quietest place; any servant will show you the way.”

He offered Mrs. Jardine his arm, and conducted her to a room which opened into the conservatory. Wyversley used it as his study, it being next the library, with which it communicated by a false door. Mrs. Jardine recovered herself in a few minutes, and then remarked Avondale’s paleness.

“You must be ill; when did you return from the country? Stuart said you went down two days since.”

“This morning.”

“And what is this sensational rumour as to your quarrel with Lord Wharfedale?”

“I can scarcely say. I have come here to-night chiefly to see the Marquis, but he is not present.”

“I hope it is nothing serious.”

Avondale did not reply. From the moment that they had entered the room the murmur of voices had been heard in the adjoining conservatory. They gradually grew louder, and the words more distinct. Avondale caught a few words, and they arrested his attention. One of the voices was a woman's, and as Mrs. Jardine made her last remark, it said, clear and distinct as the thunder clap that breaks the stillness of a summer night—

“You are quite jealous, Sydney (Killarney's Christian name). He and I lived near each other in the country. I probably flirted with him for want of some better amusement, and he—his father

is one of the better class of farmers—doubtless liked me pretty well—that your lordship will, of course, acknowledge was very likely to happen—and my father's property much better. Our parents, however, were not friendly. I never heard the reason till the other day, when I learnt that his father, a man of most violent temper, years ago tried to murder mine one night, and escaped punishment only from want of evidence."

The tones died away as the speaker withdrew from the study, but not a syllable was lost on either of the hearers. Avondale's face became perfectly ghastly with the concentrated agony that it exhibited. Each word struck on his brain like blows from a club. He quivered, but could not obtain a momentary oblivion by fainting; his frame was too strong. He turned half mechanically as if to walk away, then reeled, and finally sank down into the nearest seat. He could not speak; his tongue seemed swollen, and was choking him. He could not weep; his eyes were dry, their moisture sucked up by the fierce heat that was pervading his frame. Mrs. Jar-

dine gazed at him in deepest commiseration, and hung over him with a mother's tenderness.

"Walter, my dear boy," she entreated, "do not be so dejected; bear up, it will kill you else. Don't, don't let those words so distress you. You do not care for her; don't think of what she says. Oh, it was most cruel and heartless; but you have many friends, and you will find some true woman to comfort you."

Stuart Jardine came hurriedly in while she was speaking, and naturally was surprised at the sight.

"It is that horrid girl," said his mother. "The odious creature! she is a fiend, not a human being. Oh, Walter, try to recover yourself. Don't stay here longer. Stuart shall accompany you home."

Avondale rose, but he staggered like a drunken man.

"Sit down again," said Mrs. Jardine, "while Stuart takes me back to the ballroom, and he shall return at once."

Avondale did, and Mrs. Jardine left him half crying, for she valued him next to her own

children. Stuart was back in a few minutes. As he entered the room several others came into the library. Through the false door every word could be heard. They had come to see a piece of old armour, but passing events formed the topic of conversation.

"I am not surprised that Wharfedale has kicked him off, he has been spunging there long enough," said one.

"He has not been spunging. He is a young fellow of genius, and comes of a good family," objected another.

"His grandfather was an M.P. years ago," added a third.

"What difference does it make?" said a voice that could easily be distinguished as Talbot's, "that a man's grandfather was in Parliament. Good family! why Dawson says his father is a farmer, and his genius is as good at leading on young Wyversley to the gaming table as it is at politics."

Avondale stood erect now. His cheek was flushed, and his eye was bright; and Stuart Jardine, who had heard enough from his mother

to explain the previous scene, was alarmed at the savage pleasure that lit up his countenance. He threw open the door, and stepped lightly, pleasantly into the midst of the group. Several recoiled, for there was that in his face which denoted mischief.

“Captain Delancourt, I am extremely obliged to you.”

He wheeled round on to Talbot. That unfortunate personage, who, though somewhat shorter was far stouter and heavier, literally quailed beneath his glance.

“You damnable cad!” and he seized him by the collar and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. “Has any fellow here a riding whip?” he asked.

“I have,” said Delancourt. “I happened to put mine in my overcoat, as I not unseldom carry it instead of a cane—it is good gutta percha.”

“Will you oblige me with it? I dare not let this fellow go, to fetch it myself, or he would, probably, run away. Bring him a walking stick; he shall have fair play; and some one stand in the next room to keep off intruders.”

Delancourt brought the two weapons. The

whip was handed Avondale, and the stick to Talbot; but the latter seemed as though paralysed, and made no attempt to defend himself. Avondale thrashed him till he writhed with pain, and roared for mercy.

“Down on your knees and confess to all that what you said about me was a heap of lies, and that I have gone to the house you alluded to very generally at your solicitations.”

Talbot did so, being in abject fear; and, indeed, others present dreaded whether their turn would not follow next. They never before, or later, saw rage so personified as then in Avondale. The confession duly made, he said—

“Now hide yourself from the sight of all honourable men, and be thankful you have got off so easily. Were it not that it would be sheer brutality, I would give you a final cut across the face, to leave there a mark similar to what you have attempted to put on my fame.” He scanned the others, but could not determine whom he had heard the first. “Some gentleman said that the Marquis of Wharfedale had kicked me off, and that I had been spunging there long

enough. Apart from the question of the good taste of thus speaking of an absent person with whom you are unacquainted, I may inform the speaker that the first part of his observation, if not a complete lie, is, at least, altogether premature. Secondly, spunging is not the term to be applied to my connection with that nobleman. People sponge who borrow money on every possible opportunity, and on every conceivable excuse, and forget to repay it—don't they Lewis?" addressing these last words to that impecunious individual, and glaring at him, as if suspecting him to have been the speaker in question.

"Hang it, Avondale," replied Lewis, hastily, "I did not say anything about you, and was most grieved that any one did."

"So, doubtless, is the fellow who is standing, or trying to stand, by the door there. Had you not better take yourself off, sir? Delancourt will, doubtless, make your excuses to Miss Villiers,"—rather a bitter sneer this, as Delancourt and Talbot were rivals for that lady's hand.

"I am extremely sorry, Avondale," said one

of the group, "but it was I who spoke the words that have rightly angered you. It was said heedlessly—I scarcely know why. But nasty reports have been current about you the last week or so; how they have arisen I cannot tell; but there can be no stronger denial given to them than the horsewhipping Talbot has received, and the confession he has made. I offer you any apology a man can in honour offer."

"Thanks, Beaufoy. I regret that you should have listened to idle tales, but you and I have not yet been personally acquainted, and so you might have mistaken my character. Good evening, gentlemen. You will oblige me by saying nothing about the present occurrence—Talbot bears an honourable name, which should not be disgraced."

He left then. After walking a few yards in the open air, he said to Jardine—

"I feel wretchedly dizzy, and pains keep shooting through my head that almost stupify me."

"Had you not better see a doctor?"

"Oh, no. It is only the excitement I have

gone through lately. If we see any chemist open I will get a composing draught."

"Yes, that would be advisable. If all the places are closed, we can get a mixture at Rowdon's, a little way on. I often get stuff there, and so, I dare say, he won't object to being rung up, even if he is gone to bed, which can hardly be, as it is not yet twelve."

Mr. Rowdon opened the shop door himself, in response to their ring.

"My friend's head is aching badly," said Jardine, "he wishes for something to send him to sleep."

"Excuse me, sir," said Rowdon, touching Avondale's forehead. "Ah—let me feel your pulse—a little nervous excitement."

He poured out small quantities from two or three bottles, looking keenly the while at Avondale, whose face was much flushed, and who kept pressing his head with his hand. He asked him as to his symptoms, again touched his brow and temples, and then advised him to step out into the street—

"You find this place rather close — Mr.

Jardine will overtake you in two or three seconds."

As soon as he had left the shop, Rowdon leant forward and whispered to Jardine—

"See your friend home immediately, and get the best medical advice! This draught won't hurt him, if it does him no good. He has brain fever! and may be delirious before morning."

Jardine started,—“Good God! I was half afraid so.” He hurried after Avondale, and they walked sharply to his chambers. A fire was burning, and, by the glimmer of it, Jardine saw on the table a large square envelope, stamped with the Wharfedale crest. Avondale not perceiving it, he took the liberty to put it in his pocket, feeling sure that its contents could not but affect his friend, in his present state, disastrously. He persuaded Avondale to take some of the mixture, and to retire at once. He shook hands with him, and exclaimed as he did so, “Why Walter, your hand is burning—you must be ill. I cannot leave you till some physician has seen you.”

Avondale raised no objection—it would have been the same if he had. Jardine went directly

to their family doctor, who, after seeing Avondale, said—

“Nothing very particular—you may, however, take another portion of this, pointing to the bottle; and you must not get up to-morrow till I have seen you.”

But, having left the bedroom, he confirmed Mr. Rowdon's statement. He rang for the housekeeper, and told her that some one must sit up in the adjoining room all night, and that he would send an experienced nurse in the morning.

Jardine hastened back to Walton House. His mother had been wondering what had detained him so long, and was terribly shocked to learn the cause. She quitted the ball as soon as possible, and drove to Granstone Street, to satisfy herself that Avondale's housekeeper had made all proper arrangements. She next sent a telegram to the nearest night office, to be forwarded the first thing the next morning to Newbury.

Meanwhile, the ball went on with undiminished gaiety. It was, as we have said, on a scale of unusual magnificence, and was largely attended. The Marquis of Wharfedale came about the time

Avondale withdrew. He had, before dinner, sent the note to Avondale which Jardine had appropriated. It contained a curt refusal to hold further communication of any kind with our hero, and it would, of course, have reached him long before he left for the ball, but for some delay in its transmission.

Politics formed the staple of conversation, rather than the common petty scandals of fashionable life. Avondale's absence was remarked, and freely commented upon; and the early departure of Mrs. Jardine attracted some attention—the more so as her husband was not present—both were taken as signs of the way political currents were running. Stuart remained with his sisters, but had no opportunity of speaking to Wyversley, who was greatly astonished to find that his friend was absent.

Lady Risborough was surprised at the non-appearance of her son, said son meanwhile rolling on his bed, trying to find out the softest spot for a body covered with wheals. The spectators to his thrashing, of course, kept the matter a perfect secret; but of this Talbot was totally unaware,

and, consequently, his bodily sufferings were intensified by mental tortures, and by the thought that Delancourt would seize such a favourable opportunity of urging his suit with Miss Villiers. This latter supposition was perfectly correct, for Delancourt, though he felt bound not to divulge his rival's misfortunes, did not feel equally bound to resign the advantage thus placed in his way, and the result was, that ere the ball was over, the lady, mortified by the manifest neglect of the one admirer, had approvingly listened to the protestations of the other.

CHAPTER X.

TRUE enough, as the doctor had said. Next morning Avondale's mind was wandering, and, by the time his sister arrived in the afternoon, he was in a high state of delirium. Next day his father, though still very weak, and not recovered from his accident, came; and, either he or his daughter, was constantly by the sufferer's beside.

Their anxiety cannot be described in cold language. Mr. Avondale called in Sir Edward Johnson; but that famed physician's skill was powerless. "The patient's life depends, under God, on his strength of constitution. His brain has evidently suffered a most severe strain. You say he has been most abstemious—that is most fortunate, and will add greatly to his chance of recovery."

So, day after day, the father and daughter watched the couch of him who was so very dear to both, till, at length, they saw him gradually sinking.

BOOK VII.



D A W N .

D A W N .

CHAPTER I.

BUT none the more did political manœuvres come to a standstill, though the Wharfedale party missed the guiding hand that had hitherto, if not openly controlled, at least secretly directed their proceedings. On Wednesday evening the Marquis informed Exmoor, Kerr, and Strathclyde, who were dining with him, of his determination to get rid of the services of Avondale. They were immensely astonished and concerned, but forebore to press an explanation, as they saw it would be distasteful. Next day, about four o'clock, he received a notification from Windsor that his attendance would be required there at noon the following day. He immediately got together his chief supporters, and laid the communication before them.

“Where is Avondale?” was soon asked.

“Mr. Avondale and I have severed connection,” he replied. “I believe it will be necessary for us to proceed without the assistance of that young gentleman.”

“Why so? If it is not an impertinent question,” enquired Jardine.

“For private reasons, which, suffice it to say, cannot be examined by any one but myself.”

“But, my lord, this is not altogether a private matter. Mr. Avondale has been engaged most assiduously in it—some marked acknowledgment is due most certainly to him. Are you under any mistake? I can scarcely think that he can so suddenly have aroused your animosity.”

“He has not aroused my animosity in the sense you take it,—but he has given me reason to say I will hold no further communication with him by word or letter.”

“I imagine, Mr. Jardine,” said Strathclyde, “that this expression of the Marquis’s resolution must satisfy you that he has just grounds for it. It is plainly a private matter, which, even I, who am so much more intimate with Wharfedale, would not presume to inquire into.”

“With all due deference to your Grace, it does not satisfy me. There must be a mistake. Have you seen Mr. Avondale since this occurred? He is out of town now, but will be back this evening.”

“No, sir, I have not; and I am determined not to see him.”

“Excuse me, my lord,” said FitzHenry, “but may you not be under some misconception? The wisest of us may err—and this, whatever it is, had not transpired on Monday.”

“Excuse me, too, gentlemen,” replied the Marquis, very hotly. “I have given all the reasons I intend to give—I will not further be cross-questioned—and I am perfectly ready to withdraw, if desired, at once from any further action in the proposed negotiations.”

This, of course, put an end to the subject. The debate was directed to the direct cause of their coming together, but a cloud had fallen over them, and their deliberations were very vague and disconnected. This was not improved when Kerr and Mr. Bransdon, who had left for that purpose, returned to announce the purport of the Premier’s speech.

“He has advised her Majesty to send for the Earl of Wigan,” soliloquised FitzHenry. “It is a good stroke. I almost think we shall need Avondale’s ready wit to devise the best mode of meeting it.”

“Dear me,” exclaimed Exmoor, impatiently, “granting Mr. Avondale to be such a paragon, and I know he has been of wonderful service, still, does all our success absolutely depend upon his presence and support?”

“I hope not—I should think not,” said the lawyer. “But, just at present, it seems to me that we know neither what we are talking about, nor what we are wishing to talk about.”

At last the Marquis brought the conversation to a close, by proposing that they should think over, during the night, the course to be adopted, and the exact line of policy they would select, and meet him next morning by 10 o’clock.

“The train leaves for Windsor at 11.30, and if her Majesty intends to place the reins of Government in our hands, I must be prepared to lay before her our chief measures.”

Most of the assembly went off to the Countess

of Wyversley's. Mr. Jardine walked part of the way with Sir Henry Kerr. Being Scotchmen, they were good friends.

"What can be the cause of the disruption," asked the latter, "between the Marquis and Avondale?"

"I have not the least idea—some miserable mistake, I fear."

"So do I. It can hardly be owing to that report about the gaming table?"

"What report?" asked Mr. Jardine, quickly.

"Have you not heard? Killarney, I think, told me—it seems to be quite common. It is said that Avondale has been leading on Wyversley to gamble at some hell near Regent Street."

"It is a complete lie," interrupted Jardine.

"They go there pretty often, that is certain; and there are ugly rumours about unfair play, loaded dice, and so on. I had intended to ask our friend for an explanation as soon as I saw him."

"That you would be perfectly justified in doing, though the whole story is a lie from beginning to end. You would have, however, to

give him the name of your informant, and that you might object to do."

"Yes; of course I heard it under pledged secrecy, but Killarney implied every one knew it."

"Killarney is a mean sneak. He has already done Avondale one bad—or, as I consider it, one good—turn, and now he has seized the opportunity of his absence from town, at a most critical moment, to blacken his reputation."

Jardine then narrated briefly the origin of the feud between the Irish lord and our hero, adding—

"You know how unceremoniously Avondale cut short his lordship's pretensions last winter—I do not think it mended matters."

"Yes, I remember it well; but the rest of the story is perfectly new. But about this report—Talbot, it seems, also goes to this—hell, I suppose, is the fitting designation, and he asserts that both he and Wyversley lose whenever Avondale is their partner. This is a statement which is either true or false, and, if true, should be explained away. It is a pity Avondale has ever gone there."

"It is a great pity; but I have no doubt he

has done so in the hope of rescuing Wyversley from such a place. You may be surprised at his close intimacy with us, but this will enlighten you ;” and he described how Avondale had, at Cambridge, saved his own son Stuart from being thoroughly plundered by a set of gamblers. “He will be back to-night by the last train, and I will see him the first thing to-morrow morning, before coming to Wharfedale House. I trust we shall bring about an immediate reconciliation, for, it is evident to me, that unless we can do so the opportunity for securing power will slip through our fingers.”

“Seems very like it. We have relied a great deal on Avondale ; and, consequently, this evening, without him, we seemed quite at sea—partly owing, however, to the unfortunate mode in which we opened proceedings.”

“Good-night. I don’t feel much inclined to accompany you to the festive scene.”

Mr. Jardine was still in his study, racking his brain to account for the Marquis’s sudden enmity, when a carriage stopped, and he was astonished to see his wife.

“You are home early, my dear—are you unwell?”

“No, but Walter Avondale is returned to town, and is already stricken down with a mortal sickness. Something has arisen to excite the Marquis against him—what he did not tell Stuart. He came back this morning on receipt of a telegram from Wyversley, but has not yet been able to see the Marquis. The agitation and the double journey have been too much for him, and it culminated just now when he heard himself defamed by the girl he had loved, and a friend he had trusted; and the doctor says he has been attacked with brain fever, and will be delirious before many hours have elapsed. That horrid girl! she ought to be knouted—poor Walter!” and she wept pretty freely. Mr. Jardine was inexpressibly grieved. “Stuart took this note off his table before he saw it. He thought, from the crest on it, that probably its contents would only increase his malady.”

Mr. Jardine at once opened the note, and read it, and handed it to his wife.

“Very fortunate Stuart did so. I shall re-

main up till Stuart returns—he may know, or may since have learnt, something more than you have heard. But do you retire, my dear.”

Mr. Jardine was too anxious about Avondale to rest, even after his son had come back from the ball; and he drove to Granstone Street before breakfast to enquire after Avondale.

Afterwards, he went to Wharfedale House. All who had been there the evening before had arrived, and he was the last. His face was so sad and mournful that several, on his entrance, noticed it. The Marquis was glad to see him, and motioned him a seat, but he said, “I will first take the liberty of asking whether this note is from your lordship :—

“ ‘ Wharfedale House,

“ ‘ Thursday afternoon.

“ ‘ The Marquis of Wharfedale is greatly flattered by the honour conferred on him by Mr. Avondale’s call, but trusts that, under no pretence, will the attempt be made to repeat it.’

“ This message is so cruel as to be justifiable

only on grounds of grossest injury—did your lordship send it?”

“You, Mr. Jardine, are, probably, perfectly well acquainted with my handwriting. But I, sir, will also take the liberty of asking by what right you interfere in my private concerns?”

“By the right, my lord, by which a man is always bound to protect the fame of his friend when that friend is unable to aid himself. This night, my lords and gentlemen, Walter Avondale has been prostrated by brain fever”—a general movement and expressions of sympathy—“by brain fever, brought on by over mental exertion in our cause—and the doctor cannot hold out good hope of recovery. Next his father, I am his nearest friend. I owe him more than ever I shall be able to repay, and I am bound to ask the reason why this note was forwarded.”

“And I simply refuse to be dictated to.”

“My lord, has your ear been poisoned by any report as to Avondale frequenting a gaming table, and tempting other young men to the same career. Last night I heard, for the first time, of such a report, and, unhesitatingly, gave

it the lie. Last night Avondale heard a certain gentleman spreading it—a gentleman of good blood and family—and in the library of Walton House, while the dancing was at its height, he flogged the calumniator so soundly that this morning he cannot leave his bed”—(“serve the wretched scamp right,” said the Duke of Strathclyde),—“and also made him, on his knees, confess to the spectators that the story was a complete falsehood. I may add that Avondale, from a feeling of chivalry rare in the present day, in order to save his slanderer’s family from the taint of shame, imposed on the spectators an oath of secrecy. Stuart was one of them, he has not broken his promise by telling me. This is sufficient refutation; but I can scarcely think this the real cause of your anger. If not, will you state it to some one here present—the Duke for instance? By his decision I will be bound both as to its sufficiency and as to the probability of there being some unfortunate mistake.”

“I shall be most sorry for Mr. Avondale’s death, should it occur; but the answer I gave you last evening I repeat now.”

“Then, my lord, I will take this epistle as addressed to myself, and will wish you good morning.”

Mr. Jardine had spoken calmly and solemnly, without the slightest approach to anger, but in tones of profound grief. There was a painful and prolonged silence when he withdrew. It was at length broken, and a few more disjointed observations were made. Nothing definite was or could be settled—the only determination come to was that Wharfedale should, immediately that he was informed of the Queen’s precise views, return to London, and lay them before the chiefs of his party, at a meeting which was fixed for six o’clock that evening.

CHAPTER II.

THEREUPON the Marquis set out for Windsor, his mind scarcely less distracted than Avondale's had been twenty-four hours previously. He dared not credit his wife's infidelity—yet could he disbelieve Killarney's story, confirmed as it was in the main outlines by Ravenhurst? Then he recalled the whole period of Avondale's intimacy with them, and took a species of pleasure in dwelling upon each little incident which added to the mass of damning proof.

Strange that he should have acted so, but thus it ever is, the greater the confidence the greater the mistrust, when once that confidence is shaken. Those who have loved most dearly, if the least breath of suspicion fans them, scrutinise far more sharply than fiercest foes each other's faults, and then "trifles light as air are to the jealous confirmation strong."

But of course he had no clear evidence of guilt, nothing but surmise, however near to certainty the surmise might be. Consequently, in reply to Jardine's appeal, what other answer could he have given? He felt most acutely the position he was in—he was suffering those torments which can lacerate the hearts of high-souled and honourable men alone, yet he was compelled to keep silent, and to allow his friends to put what construction they pleased on his secrecy. All these conflicting emotions completely unfitted him for the task of forming a Cabinet, supposing all his adherents were firm and steadfast, but, already, Jardine had separated himself, and FitzHenry, if not Kerr, might easily follow. He therefore was greatly disposed, when he reached the Castle, at once to decline such an attempt.

Directly on his arrival he was granted an interview. Could he pledge himself to form a Ministry? That was the whole question. Her Majesty had been advised to send for the Earl of Wigan, but seeing how disorganised parties were in the House, and highly valuing his lordship's counsel, she had chosen to summon him first.

Wharfedale acknowledged, in suitable terms, the honour his Sovereign had done him, declared his utmost exertions were at her service, but could not pledge himself. He could, however, give a decided answer that evening. This the Queen accepted; she left him free to choose his colleagues, and would not indicate a preference for any especial line of policy; she simply required that there should be no delay in reconstituting the Government, and therefore a messenger accompanied him back to town, bearing an intimation of her pleasure to the Tory chief, in case Wharfedale should fail to construct a Cabinet.

And he did fail, or rather hastily if not gladly abandoned the attempt. Kerr hesitated, influenced by Jardine's example, FitzHenry and Sir Edward Pilgrim did the same, the Duke of Strathclyde became too confused to clearly comprehend all the circumstances. Bransdon and Herbert Williams mistrusted the ability of their leader. Kelly and Lord Hainesbury thought it would do no harm if the Tories were in office a few months. Exmoor alone was confident and anxious to take upon him the responsibility of

office, though even he could not forbear joining in the chorus of regret for Avondale's absence ; and so, before night, the Tories knew that they were to have another lease of power. The Marquis in person announced to the Queen his regrets for his failure, and he remained at Windsor till next morning.

No need to quote the pæan sung by the "Constitutional" over the good news. "Every art had been used, every manœuvre employed to change the Queen's decision, and to upset long recognised principles. Mr. Maitland, whatever his other failings, had sense enough to know there was but one course open on his resignation—the placing the reins of Government in the hands of the Earl of Wigan. Yet, if we are to believe reports, a most audacious attempt has been made to persuade her Majesty to call to office the heads of a small clique, renegades from both parties, miserable in ability, still more miserable in numbers." So the old woman ran on—vituperation first, her allowance of which she had, apparently, obtained from the twin light, the "Morning Mercury," and next a flood of

twaddle anent the prosperity that must enfold the land when now

Though trade and commerce, arts, and laws should die,
Once more are seen the old nobility

benignantly watching over and directing the nation's career.

The "Morning Mercury" well deserved its popular sobriquet of "cheap and nasty." Its three "Leaders" were all devoted to politics. The first was a tirade against the Tories, enlivened by the spleen of a baulked politician, the second a tirade against the House of Commons generally, enlivened by the pleasantry of a Billingsgate fishwoman, the third was a tirade against renegades in particular, enlivened by the humour of an Old Bailey practitioner who has no case.

CHAPTER III.

WYVERSLEY had been surprised at not seeing Avondale at the ball, but he did not hear of his friend's illness till late in the afternoon, when he called on him to learn the cause. Miss Avondale had not long arrived, and Mrs. Jardine was there, too. She told him what she knew, and he then went to her husband to find out the other circumstances. Mr. Jardine was in great sorrow, and gladly gave Wyversley as full information as he could.

“Wharfedale evidently is of opinion that our friend has been leading you astray, but that is not the sole cause, nor could it be anything like what he heard Miss Dawson speaking about his own family—there must be some deeper reason, and I cannot conceive what.”

No wonder, for Mr. Jardine was a strict Presbyterian, and being himself of irreproachable

morals, was therefore the more ready to credit the rest of the world with a similar character.

“But I believe the reason groundless, and that Walter has been sacrificed to a mistake. And the Marquis, unless I am greatly mistaken, will be unable to form a Cabinet.”

“I will see him at once.”

“Yes—it will be well to do so. But he won’t be back from Windsor yet—stay and take dinner with me ; I am quite alone.”

Wyversley remained to dinner ; and consequently reached Wharfedale House a few minutes after the departure, instead of after the arrival of the Marquis. Kerr had not yet left, and from him he heard all the particulars. “Power thrown away through a mistake,” he exclaimed.

“If Avondale recovers,” said Kerr, “it will be some consolation to him to know what a muddle we have got into the moment we lost his services.”

“It will be no consolation to him—he is far too honourable to feel pleasure in his colleagues’ mishaps.”

It was four o’clock next day before Wyversley

saw the Marquis. He had then been waiting impatiently for him more than three hours. He had been thinking and thinking, but had failed to discover a clue to the mystery. Lady Campion he had at once dismissed—Ravenshurst's demeanour had not been that of a man enraged on account of his sister's dishonour; and besides whatever suspicions he might have as to his friend's intimacy with that lady, not a single fact had ever come under his observation to justify them.

Wharfedale was in an angry mood. He had just looked in at Brooks', and had experienced the mortification of receiving from his political associates and rivals their hypocritical condolences on his failure, the sting of which was increased by one or two observing—"but, of course, owing to young Avondale's sudden illness you were left almost powerless—a most unfortunate occurrence at such a conjuncture."

Wyversley's appearance did not improve his humour; it again reminded him of Avondale, and he said rather sharply—

"Well, Reginald, what is it? I presume you

wish to state your regret and so on. I will take it as said, without troubling you to put it into words."

"Your lordship's proverbial politeness has suddenly evaporated, but you are doubtless suffering from chagrin and vexation. I will come to the point at once—I regret most profoundly your failure, but I have not called on you simply to state this—I have come to ask for an explanation of the cause which has induced you so unceremoniously to break with Avondale."

"The cause I prefer to keep to myself. That should be answer sufficient."

"My lord, pardon me, if I say it is not. I am a friend to you both. If I am indebted to you for care bestowed on my childhood, and I trust I value to the full that care, I am indebted to Avondale for the healthier views of life's duties which I have of late acquired, and for the little resolution and firmness I now possess. As your friend, and as his, I pray you, I beseech you, to let me know enough of this mystery to come to a judgment as to the reasonableness of your anger."

“Your intentions do you great credit, but you must content yourself with continuing in the dark unless your friend himself enlightens you.”

“My friend, as you are fully aware, my lord, lies on a bed of sickness, from which he probably will never arise. Go and stand by it an instant, as I did this morning, and mark the mute agony of Avondale’s sister as she gazes upon the helpless form of her only brother, and vainly looks for the least token of improvement that will not come; and then remember that all this misery may be due to a mistake of yours. Walter Avondale was with me from noon till five o’clock on Thursday; he was in a pitiable state of agitation, and declared, again and again, he was innocent of all ground of offence.”

“I am grieved at the pain his illness has brought on his relations, but am not in the least responsible for it. You are such a chivalrous defender of his that I suppose you will say that he never took you to some hell in Clair Street, and that there has not been such a run of ill-luck on yourself, and on Talbot, as to imply unfair play—unfair play, by which this young gentle-

man has, by an arrangement with the proprietors of the place, considerably benefited."

"My lord," exclaimed Wyversley. "Satan himself must have been your informant—no other could have devised such a neatly adjusted tale. I have lost, doubtlessly, and so has Avondale—to say he is in league with blacklegs! you ought to be ashamed of yourself. And to repeat the legend—it is no better—of Avondale having been tempter to me, or any one else. You are insulting your own good sense by doing so, even if Talbot had not eaten his own lying words on that matter. You are aware that he has not yet recovered from the effects of the thrashing which my friend—my friend, my lord, the emphasis is yours, though I am proud of it—gave him. He was not up when I called at the house to-day, to inform him the first time I caught him at either of the clubs I would repeat the lesson."

"Dear me, Reginald—quite romantic."

"I am glad you think so. And now, after such a high opinion of my conduct, perhaps you will give me the explanation I require."

"Enough of this, Wyversley. I must end the

interview. You are a boy compared with me, but your sense should tell you my years and experience enable me to determine on a course of action without need of advice, much less dictation from others. Will you talk of something else, or shall I ring the bell?"

"I do not depart without the explanation," said Wyversley, firmly.

"You will goad me on to madness, or till I forget myself," exclaimed the Marquis, starting up, and approaching the young man threateningly. "Will you cease your prating, sir?"

It is impossible to say what would have followed had not Lady Wharfedale, unexpectedly, entered the room. She was in travelling dress.

"What is the matter, Ralph," was her wondering enquiry. "I have hurried back to town to congratulate you; but I learn that you are not in office, and, on coming here, I find you and Reginald shouting at each other, and almost fighting."

"Leave us—I have something to say to Wyversley."

"Leave you? Of course, if you wish it; but

why do you speak in that tone, my dear? What is it, Reginald?" she said, appealing to Wyversley.

"Go away, at once," said her husband, almost beside himself.

His wife looked at him in utmost amazement, and then hastily did his bidding, bursting into a flood of tears as she quitted the room.

Wyversley had been as much astonished as herself, but while he listened a gleam of the truth burst upon him, and he comprehended some of the references made by Ravenshurst. As soon as they were left alone again, he said—

"Wharfedale, I believe I can see that you are under a frightful error; and, if you do not give me an opportunity of dispelling it, I will compel an explanation by at once stating my suspicions to the lady you have this instant so grossly insulted."

Wharfedale scowled tremendously, but yielded. "Give me your word of honour never to breathe a syllable of what I tell you;" but even when Wyversley had done this, he hesitated long. At last he said—

“Last November Lady Wharfedale was called to town, nominally by the serious illness of her sister, Lady Carwithen. Two days after Mr. —, this person, was summoned from Egremont to give evidence at Waterbridge. He travelled by the night express on the Great Northern, and went on from London by the one o'clock train for Waterbridge. An hour before that train left Killarney and Ravenshurst had arrived in town by the Midland. As they came out of St. Pancras station they saw my carriage going by, and, thinking I was in it, and returning to Egremont, they directed the cabman to follow to King's Cross. They saw a lady, closely veiled, get out but when they reached the waiting room they could not immediately find her. Ravenshurst could not wait, as he was under an engagement, and therefore Killarney agreed to remain till Lady Wharfedale, as they imagined it was, should appear, and to get her ticket, and see her into the train. When, however, the lady did appear, it was to hail a cab and drive to the Central Terminus. Killarney did the same, and saw her and your friend get into the same first-class

compartment in the Waterbridge train. Is your curiosity satisfied, sir?"

"Perfectly. Good God! what a fool you have been, Wharfedale, to trust such an idiot as Kilarney! a man whose special avocation is to spread scandal, and who is actuated by the greatest venom against Avondale. And how will you ever forgive yourself?"

Wharfedale's expression of rage was changed for one of anxious surprise.

"I was in that train also."

Wharfedale looked a question he did not ask.

"Yes, I was in that train—and, what is more, I accompanied that lady back to London."

Wharfedale staggered as though struck, sat down, and hid his face in his hands.

"I knew that Walter was going to Waterbridge that day, and, being in town—you remember I came up with the Marchioness—determined to go too; but I was not aware of his train, though, as chance would have it, I selected the same. I did not, however, notice him till we changed carriages at Hatton, where I saw him and a lady conversing earnestly. As soon as he

observed me he beckoned me—‘A friend of mine, Mrs. Symonds, wishes to return to town, Wyversley. Will you do me the great favour of attending her back, and afterwards to the Great Northern Hotel?’ I was somewhat astonished, but, of course, did so; and, after seeing my charge to her destination, I came here, knowing that Lady Wharfedale was in town, and spent the evening with her.”

Wyversley added no word of condemnation, for the Marquis was shaken with violent throbs, and it was many minutes ere he could compose himself.

“Oh, Reginald, how can I ever thank you sufficiently for your persistency? What a fool I have been!—what a fool I have been!”

He sought out his wife, and, after some trouble and not a few fibs, he obtained pardon from her for his incivility.

Wyversley waited till they re-entered the apartment together.

“I suppose you may as well come with me to see Mr. Jardine. We must make some arrangements about Avondale’s election, as he cannot do

so himself. Though he is in such a serious state we had better try to get the seat for him—his election would, if he could know it, go very far to assist his recovery.”

“What are you talking about?” asked the Marchioness. “I am not quite certain whether I am in reality myself, or whether the world has not, since the beginning of the week, undergone a transformation. What is this about Mr. Avondale?”

“I forgot to tell you, my love,” explained her husband; “that he has been prostrated by an attack of brain fever, brought on by overwork and excitement.”

“Poor fellow—I hope it is not very serious. When did you see him last, this morning?”

“Yes,” replied Wyversley, as the Marquis was rather in a fix. “The attack is very serious—I will not conceal it from you—very serious; but the physicians trust that his strong constitution will save him.”

“It must be serious if that is all they can say.”

CHAPTER IV.

THEY went to Mr. Jardine's, and caught him at home. He listened gravely to the explanation, which was very halting, of the Marquis, but was impressed by his genuine tone of remorse.

"I trust, my lord, it will be a lesson never again to judge hastily."

"I believe it will. I wish to atone as far as possible for it—how can we best assist his election? I cannot altogether withdraw the notification I sent my agent."

After some conversation, they settled that Stanley Carlton and Stuart Jardine should, on Monday, go down to Maesendean, to conduct the canvass, and that they should acquaint the agent that the notice must be read, not as wishing the tenants of the Marquis to vote against Avondale, but as giving them permission to make their own choice between the candidates. The presence of Carlton was, of course, sufficient to determine the

choice ; for, whenever did English voters, “free” in all respects save politics, and “independent” of all coercion save their landlord’s will, “pure” from every species of corruption save £5 notes—whenever did they venture to oppose their lord’s wish, thus so unmistakably displayed? Jardine’s experience at Waterbridge also did him good service, and Carlton’s future title, and his pleasing manners, gained every body to his side; and both, from love for their friend—and the former from love for some one else, too—laboured most assiduously. They were also joined by Delancourt, who rendered them much assistance. The Conservative man made a desperate fight, and, indeed, polled the greater part of the voters who were *bond fide* of his own view of thinking. Nor would Charlton withdraw—he was greatly delighted when he heard of Wharfedale’s message, and proportionably disgusted when Avondale’s two representatives made their appearance. He had no chance, but he went to the poll simply to prevent, if possible, his return; for, from the failing so common to human beings, he would

have been better pleased with the success of the Tory, whose principles were directly opposed to his, than with that of Avondale, who was of nearly the same creed as himself. Friday evening, however, the telegraph flashed off to town the numbers—

Avondale, 870 ; Charlton, 392 ; Graham, 557.

CHAPTER V.

EVERY day numbers of cards were left at Granstone Street. The Duke of Strathclyde called often, and the majestic Duchess scarcely less frequently, as did also his Grace of Damnonia; FitzHenry, Kerr, the Marquis of Exmoor, Bransdon, and others were quite as constantly, but Wharfedale was by far the most regular. Twice each day he came in person, or sent a servant to inquire. His remorse now more than exceeded his previous animosity. He dreaded each morning to hear of Avondale's death, of which he must have considered himself the cause. He was in constant terror lest his wife should, in some way or other, become acquainted with his suspicions.

He had at once told Ravenshurst the truth of the case, and that nobleman was equally delighted with himself, and conceived a much higher opinion of Avondale from the moment he heard

of the flogging Talbot had received—this personage, by the by, retired to his father's country seat before Wyversley returned from Maesendean. Both, however, were in difficulty as regarded Killarney—they were well aware of the pleasure it would give him to spread a scandalous tale.

“I dare not see him,” said Wharfedale: “If I did the remembrance of my folly would cause me to quarrel with him, and, then, out of pure spite, he would proclaim the story far and wide.”

“The sole way,” replied Ravenshurst, after some minutes' musing, “to keep his mouth closed will be through the medium of fear. I will tell him that Lady Wharfedale has been informed of your suspicions—I must tell this fib or he would be utterly unable to keep quiet—though she does not know who was the originator of them. I will add that Avondale does not either, but that, if he gets well, he is determined to find out, and to treat the slanderer as he did Talbot.”

This was the only feasible course, and the Marquis reluctantly agreed to it. It succeeded admirably.

"I heard that some one had assaulted Talbot very badly," exclaimed Killarney, "Was it really Avondale, and about this?"

"No doubt of it."

"Dear me, what a hot-tempered young man, and so strong, too. Talbot must be much bigger. He must be very violent—he half-killed Talbot."

"Yes, and the same night he would have wholly killed you, if he could have found out who started the story; and that would have been a great misfortune, your marriage so near at hand."

"I think I will hurry it on, and leave town."

"I would."

"But you are certain no one besides the Marquis and ourselves have the shadow of surmise?"

"No one."

"Then, no one shall hear it from me."

And Killarney kept his word on that occasion, if he never did before.

Avondale, in his delirium, raved continually about politics and the Marquis of Wharfedale,

and their sudden disruption. To the cause of this he was ever referring—"A mistake, a mistake—I will tell him so—yes, I will see him at once—they have been telling lies—and he keeps out of the way, will not speak to me—oh, it is terrible, and my head pains so, my head pains so—I must speak to him—it is all false; yes, false, false, false—and I thrashed one of them soundly, he won't repeat it, he won't repeat it; and he begged for mercy, and confessed it was a lie; begged for mercy, and he had been my friend—friend—but who caused the other report—it was so cruel—I will find out when my head is better, when my head is better—it was she who said it; yes, it must have been—no one else could have guessed it—and she said my father was a murderer, a murderer, a murderer—and I loved her once—oh, she was too cruel, too cruel." So he would go on for an hour together; but he very seldom mentioned any female name, save Florence Vrynné's, and hers not often—even in the height of the delirium he seemed careful to prevent suspicion attaching to either of those of whose honour he was jealous. His

father and sister could only listen with aching hearts and tearless eyes. Mrs. Jardine had been compelled, by their solicitations, to inform them of the fatal conversation which had been the culminating point to Avondale's misery. The Marquis would, now and then, come into the sick room, and try to offer consolation to the father, but he could not long endure the spectacle of the grief which he attributed, in such great measure, to his own perversity. On Friday he appeared much weaker. He talked less, though his words were much more rational, and with that strange sympathy, which, even in sleep, will occasionally affect the soul, his mind was dwelling on his election. Towards the evening he sank into the soundest slumber he had had since his seizure. Sir Edward Johnson saw him, and was delighted with the change. He felt his pulse—it was beating much less violently.

“Twelve hours of that sleep will save his life—and his brain, too,” he added to Mr. Jardine. “I have been as much afraid the attack would end in madness, as in death.”

The telegram came in from Maesendean. Miss

Avondale showed it to the physician, and asked if she might tell her brother, should he fortunately wake up free from delirium.

“I can scarcely say; but I think you may, if he asks about it, not otherwise.”

The patient did wake up next morning about five o'clock, and recognised his father, sister, and nurse who had, for three hours past, been watching by the bedside.

“Dear father and Edith,” he whispered, “you here—then I have been very ill.”

He tried to raise his head, but could not. His father leant over and kissed him; and, after a few minutes, he dropped to sleep again, and dozed till nine o'clock, when he suddenly remembered his election. He asked what day it was—

“Saturday,” replied his sister, and, then, as she noticed how anxious his look became, she added, “don't disturb yourself, darling—you are elected—the telegram came last night.”

His face brightened with joy, and she fetched him the morning paper, and read him the close of the poll. He asked her to put the paper so that he could read the paragraph—it was deci-

dedly the best medicine for him; and so the doctor said when he arrived a few minutes after. Mr. Jardine followed the doctor, and completed Avondale's pleasure by telling him how grieved the Marquis was, and that all had been explained; and the appearance of the Marquis directly after confirmed it. But the doctor would not allow them to remain long, for fear of the agitation to the patient; and he made Edith lie down for the rest of the day.

“You have not slept a dozen hours the whole week; we shall have you ill next.”

Stanley Carlton, Stuart Jardine, and Delancourt, “the three knights errant,” as they were henceforward styled, returned that evening, and were allowed to see their friend for a few minutes. But Avondale did not get well immediately. Thoughts of Clare Champion, and thoughts of Florence Vrynnue retarded his recovery very much, and he had one most serious relapse, during which he was again light headed wholly, or partially so, from Good Friday till the opening of Parliament after the vacation.

From that period he steadily and rapidly

recovered. Youth quickly regains strength, and in a little more than a fortnight he had taken his seat and the oaths. Cheers, such as seldom fall to the lot of a young man, greeted him as he walked up the House; for the break up of the Wharfedale party, consequent, as it was generally believed, on his illness, had widely extended his credit, and there were many present who prophesied for him a career of glory.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Tories wasted days and almost weeks in getting their Cabinet formed and all the posts properly filled—properly filled, that is so far as party exigencies were concerned, for they had a wonderful knack of putting square pegs into round holes. The Earl of Wigan, one of the ablest statesmen, and one of the best speakers of the time was Premier, and the leader in the Upper House. The Earl had a wonderful influence among his fellows, and in office or out of office, for some years had almost controlled the votes of the peers.

His lieutenant and the leader in the Lower House was Henry Englander, a man as famed in his own way as the Earl of Wigan. Englander was a good speaker and a master of sarcasm. He was wonderfully plausible, and an adept at shuffling out of an inconvenient opinion or

difficulty. He led and his party followed, but there was many a one among the squires who distrusted, not to say disliked, Englander.

An abler man was the Viscount Wyre, eldest son of the Earl of Wigan, who possessed a seat in the Commons, and, who being some years younger than Englander, gave up to him the leadership in the Commons.

Much time was lost. Then when the Cabinet was formed, and a Bill relating to taxation was brought in, it met with so much opposition that Englander withdrew it. A few more days passed, then Easter and the Easter vacation came.

On the resumption of business in Parliament, after the Easter adjournment, Englander stated that a draft of their proposed new measure on taxation had been rough cast, and that the Bill itself would be quite ready by the following Monday, when he proposed to introduce it. He apologised for asking the House to restrain its impatience three days longer, but trusted that the unexpected defection of two members of the Cabinet, and the embarrassment thereby occasioned to their colleagues, would obtain for him

some consideration, and that even the Opposition—whoever or whatever the Opposition might be—would accord him the grace he asked. Then another hitch occurred, more time was lost, and at last on the Monday fortnight, faithful to his promise, he laid before members the details of the scheme which he had devised to meet the public wants and demands. One of his most attentive auditors was Walter Avondale.

CHAPTER VII.

AVONDALE found not merely the Wharfedale party but the whole House split up into isolated fragments. The Tories, pure and simple, who revered the Earl of Wigan, and, therefore, observed the mandates of his lieutenant, Englander, as issuing primarily from himself, were the largest and most compact body, and included about one-fifth of the assembly. The other Tories who voted with these, but who had much rather have served under the banner of the Earl of Cotteswold, were not much fewer. For all practical purposes these two sections were one; their views and principles were the same; they differed simply as to choice of leader, though even on this point many of Cotteswold's adherents mistrusted the reality of his Conservatism scarcely less than they disliked Englander's self-importance.

The Radicals had almost disappeared since the transformation of Stoe from a popular tribune into a staid Minister, but some two dozen of the most determined Radicals still hung together under the guidance of a half-crazy Irishman, a Welsh Dissenting fanatic, and the incomparable Mr. James Muddler. It was a queer set, Romanists, Freethinkers, and Independents, Repealers, Communists, and Protectionists, whose votes could never be relied upon, whose views were not the same a week together.

These marked off, there remained a clear majority of more than one-half. They were Liberals unmistakably, Liberals of various shades of opinion, but who were not either Tories or Republicans ; and they had no leader. It was to this alone that the Earl of Wigan was indebted for his ability to retain office till the close of the Session. Maitland never showed less statesmanship and tact, never put his failings so prominently before men than when, after the downfall of his Cabinet, he obstinately, with a spoilt child's ill humour, refused to take upon himself the direction of the Opposition.

For more than a month the Wharfedale party was in a state of collapse, and it was another month before they were got into order again, and even then full confidence was far from being revived towards the Marquis. During the whole of this period anarchy prevailed throughout the Liberal ranks. Not a few would willingly have followed Rowe, but his opinions on religious matters isolated him from Churchmen generally, and from Sir Edward Pilgrim, FitzHenry, and Williams in particular, and he was, besides, on bad terms with Sir Henry Kerr and others. Then the Marquis of Exmoor and Mr. Jardine were named, but neither was well fitted to take the supreme authority, and both would have refused the offer, while Avondale was ill, and more decidedly so when he was getting better again.

Consequently, on his recovery, our hero had much of his work to do once more. He threw himself into it eagerly, too eagerly, even before his health was re-established, for he sought in active employment a refuge from the saddening and remorseful thoughts that filled his mind. He

had a long interview with the Marquis, who attributed, as far as he could, his anger at the reports that he was leading Wyversley into bad ways, and to an assertion—this was not a pure make up, it came from Killarney—that he (Avondale) had been heard to say the origin and continuance of the Wharfedale party was due entirely to his exertions, and that the Marquis was a mere dummy, and never could be anything better.

“It is all false, and I am bitterly grieved—it has snatched from us the opportunity for power, which will, however, be soon offered us again. But, my young friend, you must excuse my asking you not to go to the Clair Street hell again, nor to allow Wyversley, if you can by any means prevent him.”

Avondale promised he would not do so, though he declared there had been unfair play, and that he had almost determined to find it out.

“Fair or unfair, Avondale, it is all the same—you could never find it out and bring it home.”

And so ended Avondale's visits to Clair Street.

Ravenshurst also apologised to Avondale for

giving credence to the reports, but it need scarcely be said that Avondale did not feel very comfortable at the proffer of regrets and excuses from him, and was well pleased when the interview was over.

We have said our hero went eagerly to work, so much so that the physician cautioned him against over-exertion, and his friends added their expostulations to the same effect. But the more he laboured the stronger he seemed to grow. He spent much of his time at Wharfedale House, writing for and advising with the Marquis, who, entering again with renewed vigour into ambitious schemes, gave a series of parliamentary dinners, as the Marchioness did of receptions, which vied in splendour and magnificence with those of royalty. At these dinners and receptions he was one of the best known figures. Wyversley also had changed much lately. He had shown far greater interest in public matters, and had attended in the Upper House, and voted in several divisions.

The Countess of Wyversley supplemented Lady Wharfedale's receptions by a number of

balls, the invitations to which were carefully arranged for the same political end. These were eagerly sought after, for the *entrée* to her circle was jealously guarded. In addition, the young Earl was a great catch, and for him match-making dowagers laid cunning toils, and ambitious beauties put on their most winning smiles. But though polite to all, he was impregnable to smiles and sighs, and took no more heed of the attractions that were unblushingly offered for sale than does a purchaser whose wants are completely satisfied. His mother was in despair. She deemed that marriage would be a panacea for all his shortcomings, and would perfect the reformation in his habits that had evidently been begun, and she saw the season passing away without his manifesting the least disposition to make choice of a wife.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARY JARDINE had, strange to say, of late, lost much of her sprightliness; she had grown abstracted and melancholy; and, without any apparent cause, her cheeks had become pale, and her health was failing. Her parents were much concerned for her, though she assured them she had no illness. Her sister Alison and Mr. Renshall were married at the beginning of June; and a day or two later Mr. Jardine accepted from Sir Henry Kerr an invitation for her to spend a short time with his family at Wimbledon, to see if the country air would remove her indisposition. Avondale and Wyversley frequently rode down and went for a canter with her and her father over the common. One day Wyversley's horse stumbled and fell, throwing his rider, and shaking him severely, but not dangerously. He was insensible a minute or so, and the scream of

terror that Mary Jardine gave, and her pallor caused her father to have a strong suspicion of the cause of her illness.

From Lady Wyversley's balls, of course, Avondale was seldom absent; and had not the image of Florence Vrynné filled his heart he would have had no difficulty in consoling himself for the perfidy of Miss Dawson. His sister, too, was ever there. She had been presented at Court by Lady Wharfedale. She was one of the beauties of the season, and attracted universal admiration, and probably contributed quite as much as her brother's own polished manners and talents to securing friends and supporters for him. This admiration was occasionally manifested in a manner too pointed not to be embarrassing. The first ball at which she appeared was the night following some escapade of Stanley Carlton's, about which Miss Avondale with some other girls amused herself at that young gentleman's expense. Carlton had been desperately in love with her since the preceding summer. He could restrain his feelings no longer, but that very night, seizing a favourable

opportunity, he poured out to her all that he had so long wished to say. His declaration was very jerky and somewhat disconnected, but it was—what he had never been guilty of before—unfeigned and genuine, and sprang from the heart; and his grief was sincere and unaffected when Miss Avondale, in kind but firm language, rejected his suit.

“Oh, Miss Avondale, do think it over; don’t reject a fellow straight off, wait a year, perhaps you don’t know yourself yet. I will wait gladly for an answer as long as you wish, and do anything you wish, though I can’t be such a great swell as Walter. You are as grand as he is, and I know I am not anything equal to you, but I can and do love you, indeed I do, as truly as if I had the brains of, of, those big swells, I never can remember their names. And I spoke to the governor a long time ago, and I would have spoken to you before, but have been afraid to speak to you before, and he says I can have Sunnilands, close by Worthing, and you said you liked the sea. And I will get into Parliament—indeed I will—or go up to the North Pole to

find out where the Nile is, like Delancourt, and live for six months on bear skins and old boots."

But Miss Avondale, though much grieved at the pain she had caused, could give him no other answer. .

A day or two before his sister's marriage, Stuart Jardine, acting on a hint from his mother, who reminded him that faint heart never won fair lady, and that if he did not take care the flower would be gathered before his eyes by some bolder hand, plucked up courage enough to follow Carlton's example. It was in Kensington Gardens, a beautiful calm evening in the early summer, when love was in the rustle of every leaf, in the hum of every insect, in the twitter of every bird. Mrs. Jarline, her husband, and the daughters had gone there for a stroll after an early dinner. Edith Avondale loved him ; he felt it ; his instinct told him so. She had willingly strayed behind with him, and had willingly listened to his words, but she would not give him a favourable reply. She saw that his character needed strengthening, that it had not the manly tone which the heir to

the wealth he would enjoy should have ; and she said—

“I ought not to have listened to you, Stuart ;” she had, at his sister’s solicitations, got into the habit of calling him by his Christian name, but that alone would be sufficient indication for most men, “and I will not listen to you. You have much wealth and many duties ; you do not perform them, you should get into Parliament.”

Next morning Mrs. Jardine called on her and embraced her with the affection a parent shows towards a favourite daughter—

“My darling, I am delighted. Stuart has told me all, and declares he will get a seat at the coming general election in the autumn. He may speak to you again then, may he not, my child ?”

CHAPTER IX.

Two or three days later Ravenshurst came to Granstone Street while Avondale was at dinner. He accepted the latter's invitation to sit down, but seemed very constrained and uneasy. At last he spoke his mind.

“Mr. Avondale, I wish to ask you a great favour, not, however, on my account so much as on that of a lady. The Countess of Wyversley has become greatly disquieted about her son. She believes that, or at least fears that, he is thinking of contracting a marriage which would bring the greatest possible disgrace. You know to whom I refer. I have long been aware—so have others—of his connection with that woman, but I trusted he would break it off in time, and that you would keep him out of serious danger. I fancy you have been to the house occasionally, is it not so? I have, therefore, never mentioned

the matter to the Countess. She has been very anxious he should get married, and has given her balls as much for that reason as for any other ; but Wyversley is, if not averse to, at least unimpressed by the female society of his own rank. Yesterday some one—Lady Barnet, I am inclined to think—told her the whole of this story.”

“And do you suppose Lady Barnet told it simply in order to save Wyversley ? Do you suspect no other person who prompted her ladyship to make such a considerate communication ?”

“I cannot say—not impossible that such should be the case. Has Wyversley any secret enemy ?”

“Many of us have. Captain Dawson is an admirer of the woman you speak of, but she has refused him admittance to the house. He would be glad to get Wyversley out of the way ; he would be still more glad if he could at the same time arouse ill will between the Countess and her son, or between her and the humble individual speaking. You are aware of the relation in which he and I stand to each other. I am, therefore, much disposed to think that he has prompted the Countess’s informant.”

“Well, however, that may be, Lady Wyversley sent for me last night, and I was of course under the necessity of acquainting her with all I knew. She determined to see the woman, and appeal to her generosity. Rather absurd you may deem such a resolution ; but I did not oppose it, because she had, before I arrived, spoken to Reginald, and prayed and besought him to sever the connection : but all in vain—he is apparently infatuated. She has done so this morning, and her journey was fruitless—it was but a slight chance. She says this woman is very beautiful and of queenly carriage, and that her drawing room is furnished most tastefully. What do you think of her ?”

“Don’t ask me. We are often disposed to complain of the arrangements of Providence.”

“Poor woman ! she deserves our pity then ; but so would Reginald and his mother, and in a still greater degree, if he married her. He must have guessed the Countess’s journey, for on her return he asked the coachman where he had driven her, and the man of course, having no suspicion, told him. Thereupon he ordered his

phaeton to be ready by five o'clock this afternoon. This the Countess learnt by enquiry on seeing him drive off. She is in a sad state—I have left her in tears. She begs me to ask you as a personal favour to follow Wyversley, and to try whether you can effect anything. She is aware it is a task which she could not, save under stern necessity, request you to undertake. But what is to be done? If you can accomplish nothing, then no one can. You have acquired a wonderful influence over Wyversley—he might, perhaps this woman might, yield to you. Of course Lady Wyversley offered her anything in the way of annuity, but she would listen to no terms—plainly told her, in fact, that she loved Reginald, and would not give him up—and, I confess, I fear they will be married before the month is at an end."

Avondale was truly enough requested to undertake a most disagreeable duty. At last, after much consideration, and with the greatest reluctance, he consented to make the attempt.

Lady Wyversley's visit to Lilybank had been made at about eleven o'clock. Auricoma was in

a light morning dress, which set off her figure to full advantage. She was on the lawn as the carriage drove up, and when its occupant had alighted, she walked into the house after her, greatly wondering who it could be. The Countess was equally astonished at the beauty of the lawn and its flowers, and at the taste manifest in the drawing room, into which she was ushered; and her heart sank within her as she gazed upon the stately loveliness of the person who entered almost immediately. She felt that over her son's fate she had not the slightest control; she understood the fascination under which he had fallen, and she could not frame words to state the object of her interview. An awkward pause, and then she said, simply—

“I am Lady Wyversley.”

Auricoma bowed, trembling slightly—the crisis was come.

Another pause.

“Mother of the young gentleman who frequently visits you.”

Another and longer pause.

"I have come to pray you to discountenance his visits."

"Discountenance his visits! Why, my lady? Is he not old enough to form his own judgment on such a matter?"

"Yes, but you are older and stronger-minded; you ought to discourage him."

The Countess made a great slip in thus speaking.

Auricoma flushed at the tone.

"Older and stronger-minded, Lady Wyversley! Do you really think so? Then I mean, if possible, to make good use of those advantages."

"Oh, I pray you, madam!" exclaimed the Countess. "I spoke rashly. I pray you to give back my son—I pray you—any terms."

"Terms! Lady Wyversley," said Auricoma, rising, "you mistake. Think you I should weigh a husband against gold?"

"He is my only son—he cannot tear himself from you, if you do not give him up, and, by a mother's love, I beseech you."

"And is not a wife's devotion as great as a mother's love?"

“ But he cannot marry you.”

“ Not marry me!—and why not, pray? Does the law offer any obstacle—does society? Who was Lady Shorncliffe? What was the Countess of Haysworth in her early days—that leader of society whose receptions surpass your own? A second rate singer at a small theatre; and, then, Lady Wyversley, what was she before she became a Countess—what was she? Yet society does not refuse her, or others I could name. Does your ladyship ever hear of the Divorce Court? And I have never asked Reginald to marry me—never asked him, Lady Wyversley; but, you know, that many mothers in your rank of life have done so, have stripped their daughters half naked for his and other men’s inspection. You know how old men, greyheaded and debauched, tottering into the grave, buy the finest young women in society for nurses and for—shall I tell you what else, Lady Wyversley? They go amongst them, and examine, and pick, and choose with—would you know what thoughts?—and then they bid for and buy them over the heads of the younger men, who have no

money, and society looks on and approves— approves what? The fact of marriage, you will say; the fact that the seller has sold well, has sold her body for a title, and jewels, and a carriage, and a fortune, instead of for the means of obtaining another day's or week's loathsome existence—the fact that the mother's manœuvrings and the daughter's *finesse*, have proved successful—so far successful, that a worn-out, toothless *roué* has been cajoled into selecting one fair damsel rather than another to her—to be what, Lady Wyversley, I won't venture to say—and this society approves, and holds the woman up to commendation, provided only she steers clear of the Divorce Court.”

The Countess attempted to close her ears to the cold, cruel tones that pierced through her; she shuddered as she muttered—

“You must be a fiend to speak thus—and Reginald loves you!”

“And I love him, Lady Wyversley, as fondly and devotedly as ever you loved his father”—this was in a much gentler tone. “I love him, and I have shown it. Three years ago I met him first;

he was then going rapidly to ruin, but I could do nothing. Two years this Easter, I met him again, and it was fortunate I did. He had been disappointed; he had got into very bad hands; he was on a bad course. He had been betting and gambling; he was proposing to go regularly on the turf. Who saved him, Lady Wyversley? Who saved him? His mother? His friends? It was I, and you must know it now, if you have not known it before. It was a most difficult task, and nothing but love alone enabled me to do it. His heart was sore; his mind wanted occupation. To withdraw him from the gambling table and race-course, I had to find a greater attraction, and I found it—in love for me. He was deeply involved; and had I not succeeded in weaning him from the crew that had surrounded him, his losses that year would have been £100,000, instead of £20,000, and he would now be pointed at by society as another Brayclift, and the auctioneer would be at Walton House and Wyversley Hall, selling off the bed clothes, everything, even your trinkets. I could easily have got all this money from him for myself, or

the swindlers, from whom you could not save him, would gladly have divided with me the spoil. I began the work of reformation; Mr. Avondale completed it; I filled up the void in his heart, and supplied him with an object to expand his affections upon; Mr. Avondale's acquaintance strengthened his mind, and turned the current of his thoughts to higher aims. And, now, Lady Wyversley, is Reginald the same man he was—say three years since? You know he is not—you know that then the blackleg and the jockey were his associates, from whom he had not energy sufficient to extricate himself, and that now he moves amongst statesmen and ministers as one of themselves; you know what his aims and aspirations then were, and that, within the last month, he has spoken twice in the House of Lords—and who is to be thanked for the change?”

“You,” murmured the Countess, almost inaudibly, “but you cannot marry him.”

“But I love him,” moaned Auricoma, at length giving way to her feelings, and weeping piteously. “I love him, I love him, Lady

Wyversley, and have made him what he is—and I will not give him up—give him up to one of your painted dolls, to a lifeless piece of wax-work, empty-headed, indolent, selfish, who could not appreciate his generous disposition, who would wed him for his wealth and peerage, and would try to bring him down to her own level. I will not give him up! I will not!—I love him!—oh, my God!”

Lady Wyversley, weeping, too, advanced to Auricoma, and kissed her on the cheek.

“You have done everything for him, and yet you must see that he cannot wed you—it would be the death blow to his future career. I beg you, by the very love you bear him, to give him up.”

“I will not; I cannot. Why should I? I will make society receive me. Do you think, Lady Wyversley, I should disgrace the head of any man’s table?” she asked, rising up, and throwing her wavy hair back over her shoulders. “Does my drawing room show any want of taste? And look at me—would your son, would any man, lightly give me up?”

“ You are beautiful !—most beautiful !”

“ Why, then should I resign my husband ? I will not, I repeat it. You ask too much—please go away, Lady Wyversley—you ask too much ; I may quarrel with you—I would not, if I can avoid it. I am very sorry if I have said anything that has offended you. I would not quarrel with you any more than with Reginald—you are his mother. But I will not resign him—I promise that I will not ask him to marry me ; he shall make up his own mind. That is an advantage which no young lady in your circle would give up. She would smile and cry, and pout and entice, and use all her allurements till she had dragged an unwilling declaration from him ; and this society would applaud as a most proper and delicate action.”

CHAPTER X.

SLOWLY and unwillingly Avondale walked up the gravel path at Lilybank, but he quickened his steps as he heard within the house loud voices in angry disputation. He entered the drawing-room hastily. Stansville, Delancourt, Latymer, Bayfield, and two females were there. By the window was Captain Dawson, his forehead contracted, his eyes gleaming savagely, a sneering smile on his lip. He had apparently just arrived, for a riding whip was in his hand; and his presence was manifestly unwelcome. In the centre of the room was standing Wyversley, his face pale with rage. He was ordering Dawson off, Auricoma holding him by the arm as if to prevent a hand to hand encounter.

“You are a thorough blackguard, sir, and a disgrace to the profession to which you belong. You have, I am persuaded, spread the reports

about Avondale. I willingly believe that there was unfair play and loaded dice, but I believe that you, Captain Dawson, got the advantage from this, and were not, improbably, in league with a whole set of scoundrels. Be off at once; your presence is contamination."

"Gently, my dear Wyversley; gently. Contamination perhaps to an immaculate boy like yourself"—he hissed the words out like so many drops of venom—"but scarcely so to the cherub that is hanging on your arm. Marry her, my dear fellow, marry her; but guard her well afterwards, and keep her out of the way of every friend that has a ten pound note to spare."

Auricoma shrieked at the gross insult; Wyversley rushed on the speaker, but Dawson, a far stouter and more powerful man, felled him to the ground, and then deliberately cut him across the face with his riding whip. Avondale sprang forward to arrest a repetition of this act of cruelty, but fortunately, for he was still weak from his illness, Delancourt was before him, who struck, with giant force, two simultaneous blows, one on the head, the other on the shoulder,

which sent Dawson flying through the window, and rolling down the lawn till he fell in the centre pond. He emerged dripping and stupefied, and walked off, foaming at the mouth, and hurling curses at those in the villa.

Wyversley, half senseless for the moment, sprang to his feet as Dawson went crashing through the glass and woodwork of the window. Those present prevented him following Dawson. Auricoma, too, needed his attention. She possessed strong nerves and a masculine mind; but the insinuation, conveyed in Dawson's speech, had been so abominable, and the taunt so savage and malignant, that she was sobbing hysterically, and her body was quivering as though torn by agonising pains. Her mind had ever been pure compared, not only with those with whom she had associated, but with those whom, at her interview with Lady Wyversley, she had held up to scorn. She had of late secluded herself from all who were acquainted with her past career, and she had indulged the madness of hoping she might be the wife of the young Earl—and thus the hideous sarcasm fell on her with ten-fold

violence. Dawson was a disappointed admirer, an admirer whose advances she had repelled even before she knew Wyversley with a dislike very near akin to loathing, and to whom she had now directed the servants to refuse admission. He it was who had prompted Lady Barnet to give the information to the Countess; he had come to Lilybank to-night thinking that Wyversley certainly would not be there, but having no other defined purpose, save that of seeing Auricoma, and arousing her resentment by a tale of Wyversley's desertion of her. This absurd intention was frustrated by the young nobleman's presence; and he, goaded on by evil passions and by blind animosity, had compressed into the few words he uttered all the malice he was capable of.

Avondale and the others withdrew to the dining room, leaving Wyversley to attempt to assuage Auricoma's misery. In a short period he joined them, saying that she was too unwell to see them again. "Wait, a little while, Walter. You are going my way, and I can give you a lift. Good night, gentlemen." When these had left

the room, he said, "Walter, that scoundrel has killed Auricoma, or nearly so. She is, if not my wife, at least a very dear friend. I must fight him."

"Fight him! Why you must be mad! Fight a duel in England at this time!"

"In England, or out of it, I mean to fight."

"But you know the state of the law, and, besides, this man is a villain—you would have disgraced yourself by fighting such a one half-a-century back."

"I know what the state of the law is, and I trusted you would not, on that account, have hesitated to act as my second. This man has not been proved a villain—therefore I may fight him. He has insulted me doubly—therefore half-a-century back I must have fought him."

"'Tis not for fear of the consequences to myself, Wyversley—I would gladly take your place if it is to be so."

He called back Delancourt, who was walking his horse down the path, and explained matters to him. Both tried to move Wyversley, but in vain. Finally, Avondale said,

“Nothing can be done to-night. I will see you first thing to-morrow morning, and if you still persist in your cooler moments, I will make the necessary arrangements, and Delancourt, no doubt, will act for this man.”

This was agreed to, and Wyversley went off with Avondale and slept that night at his chambers. But when the morning came, the affair was at an end. That night Clair Street was broken into by the police, and several of the frequenters were captured.

Among them was Dawson himself, as well as the proprietor and the attendants. There is little honour among blacklegs, and the proprietor, to get his own penalty mitigated, made a clear breast of the relations between himself and Dawson, which were of a kind so very nearly akin to conspiracy that the magistrate, after fining the other men who were captured, sent these two for trial. Dawson obtained bail and disappeared, was cashiered, and omitted to answer when called on the next sitting of the Central Criminal Court. The proprietor received

six months' imprisonment, and Dawson's recognizances were escheated.

Wyversley himself, the following morning, immediately after hearing from Stansville, who had been one of the unfortunates, an account of the affair, hastened to Lilybank. The servant who saw him said that Auricoma had not left her bedroom, being rather unwell, and that she would not be able to see any one that day. He called next morning about the same hour. A servant handed him, with tears, the following letter :—

“Lilybank, Friday Evening.

“My darling,

“I am going to leave for ever the house where I have spent so many happy hours, and my heart is breaking. I must not see you again, my darling. Your mother came on Wednesday and told me so, I would not believe her, but I must believe that cruel man. Your wife must be one who will not be a reproach to you. Your mother said so, but I thought she was jealous of me or despised me, and I would not listen to her. But she did speak the truth,

my Reginald—yes, my darling, the truth—for society would scorn you, and laugh at you for marrying me. I thought that you could despise society, but you cannot—it was my love which blinded me. I can see clearly now, and my love makes me see even more clearly. All your friends and relations would scorn me, but I should not care; but they would scorn you, too, and that I could not endure, and you might, perhaps, repent of your love and call it infatuation. And then if we had children they would insult them, and hold up their mother's shame to them—yes, darling, you know they would, even those women who, though not driven by necessity, sell themselves body and soul for money and titles, and those viler women who trade on their husbands' shame and credulity, and society applauds them. And how could I live then? Oh, my heart is breaking—pray God I may die soon! I have loved you, Reginald, loved you with a love too great for one human being to give another, and I have clung to you as the drowning man clings to the floating plank. Yet I must give you up—the Countess

said I must, though I said I would not. So I am going away, and you must not search for me, and if you did I should not be here long, for God is good and He will soon take me away. But do you do your duty as a rich nobleman. You have so very much to engage your attention, and you can influence so very many people for good. You have begun to be a great man. Please continue so—I ask it as a last request. My dearest, while I live I shall ever be thinking of you, and praying that you are acting nobly. I have taken but a few things, as otherwise I should not be able to hide myself easily, and so I leave you to do as you like with the rest. I have taken little Fido with me, but poor Reginald I leave for you—he is so big. And I want you to provide for Mary and Ellen. I must not write any more, or I shall not be able to stop at all. This is only a short note, but it is enough to say how dearly I love you, so dearly that I cannot give you up, and that you can never see me again. Good by, my darling, my dearest, my Reginald.

“VIOLET.”

CHAPTER XI.

A FEW sentences will suffice to state what turn affairs took with respect to two or three of the persons concerned herein. The marriage of Killarney and Miss Dawson took place a couple of days before the occurrences narrated in the preceding chapter. It was earlier than originally fixed, and it had been hurried on by both parties; and, in less than a fortnight, the real reason came out—Dawson and Killarney each had been trying to hoodwink the other, and, in a manner, both had succeeded.' Mr. Dawson had gone into heavy speculations for the rise in sugar and indigo; a crisis occurred, prices fell rapidly, and, on investigating his affairs a week or two after the marriage, he was a bankrupt—unless his son-in-law could assist him to tide over the crisis.

Killarney's aunt, Miss Dollmore, from whom

he had considerable expectations, had died some two months previously. She was somewhat of a miser, and was reported to be worth, in land and savings, not far off £100,000, and this was not much under the mark. But she left no will, and on investigating her affairs it was discovered—what, doubtless, Killarney had known, if not always, certainly before his marriage—that she was illegitimate. Her wealth, therefore, went to the Crown. Miss Dawson's marriage settlement consisted of her father's promise, which promise was now worth about half-a-crown in the pound. And Killarney's own income was what remained after paying the interest of the incumbrances on a small estate. Miss Dawson was a peeress, whose husband had barely sufficient for his own wants as a bachelor.

Killarney, therefore, was unable, even if he had been willing, to lend any aid to his father-in-law, whose property, including his big house in Lyddonshire, was all sold; and he had once more to recommence life as a commission agent in the city. Killarney and his wife found it necessary to retire to the country in order to

exist on Killarney's limited income, but there the life they led was so disagreeable that Lady Killarney, with her husband's full permission, left him, dropped her title, and returned to her father, and thenceforward took charge of his little household.

CHAPTER XII.

AN hour after receiving Auricoma's letter Wyversley appeared before his mother, looking so ill and wretched, that she was alarmed—

“Reginald, my child, what is the matter?”

For reply, he placed before her the letter. She read it through. The tears rose to her eyes, for the few sentences it contained spoke in trumpet tones to her heart, conveying to her the dying wail of a sister over the hopes and affections that had been blasted in fullest strength. But she did not for a moment forget the stern demands of the class in which she moved, and she said—

“My Reginald, it is better so. She was a true woman—but it is better so. You will soon cease to feel your grief so sharply, and then you will rejoice that you have not married her. You would, indeed, have called your love infatuation.”

“Shall I forget, mother?” he said, in a husky

voice. "Whom shall I marry, and then be rejoiced that I did not marry her? The girl you once recommended me, whose sisters are now in the Divorce Court—Maude Lancelot? You have seen her, mother, she says. Did you tell her that Margaret Glyndour, or Charlotte Fitzroy, would be no reproach to me? Oh mother, mother, she has done so much to rescue me from the turf and from gambling, she had become all to me; and now you have helped to part us. Will you carry out her wishes, and provide for those two servants—they love her. I cannot go to the house again."

He left and went to Granstone Street, and waited till Avondale came in at lunch time.

"I wanted to see you, Walter, but have been afraid you would not be in till this evening. She is gone."

His woe-begone countenance added sufficient explanation. Avondale offered all the consolation he could, but wisely forbore to reason with him. He advised him to run down into the country for a week or two—

"The excitement you have gone through

during the last few days has been quite enough to upset you. Country air, and change of scenery, will invigorate you. You are rather weak just now. Get a little stronger, and then you will be able to consider it calmly. No man must allow his grief to overpower him too much."

This advice Wyversley took. The same evening Avondale gave Mr. Jardine the whole history of the affair, and ventured, now that the liaison was broken off, to remind him of his daughter Mary—

"You cannot, sir, close your eyes to the state of her feelings."

"Perhaps not. But then, according to your own showing, he is desperately in love with this woman. I cannot throw Polly in his way as a counter temptation, and I should be sorry for any man to veer about like a weather-cock from one to another."

"No need for that, my dear sir. If you won't refuse your consent, that is all that is necessary. Wyversley won't veer about; but he must have some female heart to fall back upon. I have

often heard him say so. His nature is, as it were, only half developed. He needs a constant companion and adviser in the shape of a true and loving wife. He is, however, somewhat difficult to please, and I believe that for Mary's company alone has he ever evinced a decided preference. If he has any liking at all for her, the liking would soon, now that he is alone, ripen into love, and, if Mary loves him too, would you deny your sanction?"

Mr. Jardine did not say no; and, therefore, Avondale told his sister, and she, on the first convenient opportunity, hinted to Lady Wharfedale the plot. The Marchioness, a day or two later, mentioned at her next morning's call to Lady Wyversley the secret with which she was entrusted. The Countess, if not exactly overjoyed with the proposed match, saw little objection to it. She was, of course, already acquainted with the Jardines, and she, therefore, determined to make the acquaintance more intimate.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALL the while Avondale was fully occupied, getting together once more the separated members of his group. This was no easy task—they had no confidence in each other and their cohesion, and they distrusted Wharfedale as a leader. But he kept to his task, and, little by little, he got rid of the difficulties. Exmoor had not separated from the Marquis; Jardine and Bransdon soon rejoined him, Kerr and FitzHenry gave their adhesion after some hesitation, and these were followed by the majority of the genuine Liberals.

The Session went on. The Wharfedale party daily grew stronger, and, as they increased in numbers and compactness, the Government became weaker and weaker. No need to detail minutely the course of events—it is written in political history of the time. Finally, the crisis

came. They sustained a defeat on a clear, substantive issue; a defeat which could not be explained away even by Englander's own smooth reasoning and easy principles. So he fell back upon his usual resource—an adjournment till the next Monday.

On the Saturday evening Avondale was at Wharfedale House. Ravenshurst, and one or two more intimate friends of the family, were present, and the conversation turned more particularly upon Wyversley, and they were very glad to hear that there was a chance of Wyversley and Auricoma being separated.

While they were talking a telegram was brought for Ravenshurst. He opened it, read it hastily, and, with a suppressed exclamation, took the Marquis by the arm, drew him a few steps aside, and handed him the telegram. Avondale could not avoid hearing the words, "Accident—serious—this morning—fall—riding." After a hurried conversation, Ravenshurst withdrew, asking the Marquis to make his excuses to the ladies; and, as the others rose to go to the drawing room,

Avondale also retired, pleading that his sister was alone.

The Monday morning came, and spite of many rumours which were flying about, the political question of the hour remained unanswered—what will the Tories do?

Perhaps, but it was only a perhaps, the Premier might dissolve Parliament.

“I don’t think he will,” said the Marquis, to Avondale, at lunch. He had just been perusing one of the “Constitutional’s” productions. It was a choice specimen of abuse. “The party that, favoured by the suddenness of their attack, had carried the adverse vote last week, was an undisciplined rabble, united for the nonce, as thieves can hold together to get plunder, or to resist legal authority, but, for all other purposes, in an utter state of disorganisation. They had no recognised leader. The person, leading them for the time being, directing their movements, we had almost said, directing their wanderings would be a fitter expression—was a gentleman trained in the school of Australian

politics, whose pretensions to office had, it was understood, been cruelly snubbed by Mr. Maitland. What were their principles? They had none—they would be driven to despair if directed to explain their views of Government, and would inevitably fall to blows over the task of dividing the spoil. All would want to be, at least Cabinet Ministers—no lower position would satisfy the ambition of the meanest among them. Is it to hands like these, and to men of this kind that the Premier can venture to resign the sacred charge committed to his trust? Dare he do so? What would be the verdict of posterity on such an action?—what will be the verdict of the country? The whole nation is looking on at the struggle with anxious eyes. To them, to his fellow citizens, his fellow Britons, let the Earl of Wigan appeal before he allows cunning and trickery to accomplish their aims, and win the reward of their villany," &c., &c.

Poor lady, she was going from bad to worse. Perhaps she was personally unwell, and the pain of internal suffering had augmented the grief with which she was agitated on account of the

impending misfortunes of her country. Perhaps she had imported some scribbler from the New York press ; perhaps—but it is no use speculating.

“Nor do I,” said Avondale, replying to Wharfedale’s observation. “I have read that article—it is rather amusing. But, though it may be inspired, I have come to my conclusion simply from knowledge of Englander’s disposition. I don’t think there will be a dissolution ; the result might, very probably, be unfavourable to the present Cabinet. More likely under pretence that a dissolution, just now, would be very inimical to public interests, they will retain office for the remainder of the Session, and will have a general election in the autumn, and a meeting of Parliament next November to determine the result.”

“Not unlikely ; that has not struck me before. I suppose, in such a case, we must let them have their own way?”

“I suppose so. Indeed, we are not yet ready for office, and shall be all the better prepared, after a few weeks leisure, to make arrangements.”

“Yes; no doubt of it.”

“And you will be the better for a good holiday, Mr. Avondale,” said the Marchioness. “You are looking thoroughly ill again. You have been over working yourself lately.”

“Thank you for your kind observation. I fear I have been doing too much. I was not at all well last night, and Edith would have the doctor in, and he said I must do nothing for some time. I think I shall take his advice, and run away to Scotland before the week is over.”

But it was not work alone which had given him a pale cheek. There was continually gnawing at his heart the remembrance of Florence Vryne. She was separated from him for ever, and even, if she were not, between him and her would glide the figure of Clare Campion. Avondale was no hardened *roué*, and, consequently, it was not with a feeling of pride that he looked back on those short weeks of passion that had been followed by long months of remorse.

The communication made by Engländer in the House of Commons that evening proved the correctness of Avondale's surmise. The Ministry

would dissolve at once if required, but they would prefer to retain office the rest of the Session, withdrawing the two Bills introduced by them as their stock measures, and discharging the purely routine duties of a Government. In the autumn there should be a general election, and Parliament should reassemble in November.

To this proposal no strong objection was raised, and the House speedily so thinned, that a count-out put an end to the sitting. The chiefs of the Wharfedale party were well satisfied with the arrangements, and they dispersed, after mutual felicitations, to think over their future. Avondale accompanied the Marquis back to Wharfedale House. Both were in the highest spirits. As they entered the Hall a servant said that Lord Ravenshurst was waiting in the library, anxious to see them both.

“Both? Did Lord Ravenshurst ask to see Mr. Avondale as well?” enquired Wharfedale.

“Yes, my lord,” affirmed the man. “Your lordship and Mr. Avondale.”

With a beating heart Walter entered the library. Ravenshurst was looking out of a window.

He turned round, his countenance betraying deep emotion.

“Oh, Wharfedale! she is dead!”

“Dead! You surely cannot mean it.”

“Yes; she died this morning. My poor sister! My only relative! the dearest being I had on earth.”

He turned his face away, for he could not control his grief.

“Ravenshurst, my dear fellow, do not be so cast down. I am most truly grieved—she so young, so beautiful; her death so sudden!”

A long pause ensued. Then Ravenshurst spoke again in hollow tones of deepest dejection and sadness.

“I have something to say to you, Wharfedale, but how shall I tell it? Oh, my God! Wharfedale, the lady that accompanied Mr. Avondale to Waterbridge—part of the way to Waterbridge—was my poor sister! My darling Clare! Her life, I see now, has not been happy. Campion, I knew, was not worthy of her, but I trusted she was content. Words passed at Egremont between her and Mr.

Avondale, and she forgot she was married. That is all, Wharfedale. Please go away, Mr. Avondale. I have told the Marquis what I was obliged to tell. My sister spoke of you once or twice last night. She held you free from blame. She wished you happiness, and that you and I should be friends in future. So we will, if possible—but leave me now.”

CHAPTER XIV.

EIGHT days later Avondale watched, from the little pier at Inversnaid, on the shore of Loch Lomond, the sun set behind the hills on the other side of the lake. The shock of the communication made by Lord Ravenshurst had completely upset him, and during the night he was delirious again. He recovered his senses in the course of the next day, and then the doctor peremptorily ordered him to leave London. After consultation with Mr. Jardine, he determined to make a tour through Scotland. He would have preferred Italy if only to follow the steps of Florence Vrynné in the preceding summer, but he was afraid of the long journey. He had come to Stirling, staying there three days, then to Balloch, and was proposing to go up the Caledonian Canal. A letter was awaiting him, when he reached Inversnaid Hotel that afternoon, from his father. It contained un-

expected news—the death of his only known relative, Mrs. Morton, his father's second cousin, the owner of Morton Grange, in South Lyddonshire, who years before had quarrelled with his father, but had always been kindly disposed towards himself, and now dying, had left him Morton Grange, some £3,000 a year.

Avondale and his sister had walked about the grounds of the hotel, and had seen the waterfall that originated Wordsworth's poem "To a Highland Girl."

"These grey rocks, this household lawn,
These trees a veil just half withdrawn,
This fall of water that doth make
A murmur near the silent lake;
This little bay, a quiet road,
That holds in shelter thine abode;
In truth together ye do seem
Like something fashioned in a dream."

They were now sitting on the pier, watching the daylight depart, and feeling the night draw on. It was a lovely time, so very lovely. The air was balmy, soft, soothing to a fevered brow. A blissful quiet, a holy calm was spread around; the insects had ceased to hum; scarcely a leaf dared to move; not a cloud broke the ex-

panse of the sky. To the south-east, over Ben Lomond's towering brow, rose slowly and majestically in all her grandeur the summer full moon, and 'neath her rays glittered the waters of the lake, faintly rippling like a sea of silver.

Walter and Edith were silent, but the thoughts of both were turned to the same subject. All Walter's aims and hopes had been crowned with success. A few short months would see his party in office, and himself with a seat in the Ministry ; was not that happiness enough ? He had marked out for himself a goal ; he had reached it, and the feat had won him cheers, praise, caresses ; what more could he desire ? If anything had been wanting, the letter he had just received would surely complete his measure of satisfaction. Henceforth he could take a position more in accordance with his ancestry and his aspirations.

And yet, filled to the brim as was his cup of success, it was filled with bitterness. Nevertheless his heart was not racked as it had been for weeks and months with contending passions. These had subsided, and had left a dumb, cold

despair overpowering him. He was at peace now, as the volcano is at peace when its fires have burnt out; as the avalanche is at peace when crushed into utter ruin under it lie vineyards and villages, flocks and their owners; as the swollen river is at peace when it overspreads the fruitful plain; as ocean is at peace when from its breast have disappeared the gallant ships that, ere the tornado came, were riding so gaily on it.

He was at peace—so the human heart is at peace when between it and its dearest hopes and its most ardent longings has been fixed a barrier, impassable, immoveable.

He kept musing over the past; over his childhood. He recalled himself and Florence, as boy and girl, constant playmates. Then they were older and bigger, but playmates still, and each vacation, as he returned from Shrewsbury, he hastened over to Brentwood to tell Mr. Vryane and Florence the history of the half-year. His college career followed. He saw little of Florence. Other thoughts filled his mind; a yearning for distinction expelled every opposing passion. Fame became his guiding star, and the grand idea seized

him—the idea which he had carried out to full fruition. The image of Florence almost faded away, till last Christmas he met her a woman in the full flush of beauty, the wooed of many admirers, and he saw her as though he had never before seen her, and he loved her as men love but once. So he mused, and thought, and pictured to himself the happiness which could never be his, and he groaned in utter misery—

“Oh, Florence, Florence, how I love you! Have you left me? My God, would that the past were a dream!”

His sister hearing him, rose from her seat and kissed him fondly.

“Walter, dear brother, don’t be so sad. Perhaps she has not yet left you; she loved you once.”

He started; he had forgotten where he was.

“Edith, love, I was dreaming. Let us go in, it is getting late. Let us go in; I am so miserable. I shall jump into the lake else, if only to get rest from bitter memories. See how placid it lies.”

“Yes, my brother; but don’t talk so despond-

ing, it makes me, too, feel so unhappy. Yet we ought not to be so. See how beautiful God's works around us are; see the loch glistening as the moon beams fall on it; see those crags on the other side, how grandly and proudly they jut out into the air. Everything is grand and sublime, and everything is at rest, and our souls should be so too. What a dread stillness is amongst these hills. Oh, my brother, let your spirit be calmed; do not despair. We will go in if you wish it; but let us stay a little longer. Would you had told me you loved Florence! I would have prevented this marriage. But, dear Walter, the report may not be true. I have not heard once from her since she left for Naples last March. I will write to her now, or find out through some one."

"No, my sister, you must not. It is certainly true. Your happiness in future must be my source of satisfaction. But let us talk no more about it—let us go in. We rise early to-morrow."

"Let us see the persons in that boat land first—can't you hear them?"

"Yes, and I can just catch the faint sound of

some one singing."

"It is, I think, a woman's voice."

The boat came quickly towards them, two men and a lady in it.

Edith listened acutely. "Walter, it is Florence," she half shrieked. "It is Florence! and singing 'Absent, but not forgot.' Oh, she has not forgotten you. Come and meet them; the landing-place is by that tree."

But her brother would not move. "I cannot see her—and she is going to be married to another."

"I will then meet them as they land—we might miss them to-morrow." She stood on the beach as Mr. Vrynné got out.

"You here, Edith!" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes—so is Walter, on the pier. He is afraid of you, at least of Florence. Oh, Florence, come and speak to him, and you, sir. He has been ill to death, and now is very unwell, and so thoroughly wretched; Mr. Vrynné, he is afraid"—she whispered to prevent the boatman hearing—"is afraid Florence is to be married."

Mr. Vrynné took his daughter's arm in his—he felt her tremble—and walked to Avondale. “How do you do, Walter? Edith says you have been very ill—I am extremely grieved to hear it.”

Walter could not reply, speech had failed him. Mr. Vrynné turned away with Edith. Florence held out her hand. Walter found words for her, though they were few. “You are not going to be married then?” he said simply.

It seemed but a few seconds before Mr. Vrynné was back again.

“I have taken Edith in, and you had better follow. It is nearly twelve o'clock, and is getting chill.”

CHAPTER XV.

EDITH had told Mr. Vrynné all the political doings of her brother. She did not, however, mention the news which had yesterday reached them from home, thinking that Walter would like to announce that. So next morning, at breakfast, he handed to that gentleman the letter.

“I am extremely delighted—nothing could please me better. Here, Florence, read this note. Indeed there is a paragraph in it which concerns you rather than any one else, but I suppose Walter would object to your seeing it.”

Walter and Edith had purposed ascending Ben Lomond, but the expedition was now put off.

“We can do so to-morrow,” said Walter. “We must get up early and catch the first boat, unless we go down to Rowardennan this evening, and stay the night there; but it is disagreeable changing one’s hotel more than necessary.”

To this they agreed. The forenoon was well advanced before they left the breakfast table, so very much had they to hear of each other. Then they rambled some distance along the cliffs that overhung the lake.

“How very beautiful it is,” said Mr. Vrynne, “fully equal to any of the Italian lakes. The only difference is that there are no vineyards coming down to the water’s edge, and that the summits of Ben Voirlich, the Cobbler, and the rest are not white with snow.”

Walter and Florence lingered by themselves. To them the day sped quickly. A year’s wanderings, a life’s hopes each had to pour into the ear of the other.

“Walter, you don’t know how much I suffered last winter.”

“And you don’t know how much I suffered, Florence. I loved you, Florence dear, from the first day I saw you then. You seemed, I cannot say why, to have become altogether a different being to what you were before, and I loved you so ardently, but so hopelessly—I will tell you,

some day, why, darling, but not now. It would only dim our happiness."

"I thought you despised me, Walter. I had loved you ever since you went to College, when I was not at home during the first vacation. I had such strange hopes and longings; I could never banish your image from my mind. Every time Edith mentioned your name in her letter I felt as I had never felt before, and then at last I learnt what it was to love."

"My darling!"

"I saw you the next vacation, but you were just the same; and the next, but you were not the same. You were still like a brother, but you were in love with Miss Dawson."

"Forgive me, dearest—I was utterly blind."

"I repressed my feelings, though it was agony. I smiled, when my heart was torn; and I laughed gaily, and chatted when you were speaking tender words to another."

"Dearest Florence, I will try to repay you with a lifelong devotion."

"Then papa got angry, for he guessed the truth; and he spoke to me, and would have

broken off our intercourse, but I would not allow him, and I never told even Edith, though I used to cry bitterly nearly every evening, for my star of hope was growing dimmer."

"Oh, Florence, don't speak of the past—pray don't. I cannot endure the thought that you cared for me, and that my perversity should have pained you. Forgive me, Florence, forgive me, dearest!"

He was reclining on the heather by her side, holding her hand and covering it with kisses.

"My darling Walter, I have nothing to forgive. I am proud of the pain I suffered." She bent her head and pressed her lips to his cheek. "Walter, you are weeping! You must not—it hurts me so."

"Weeping, love, with regret, and with joy, too."

"Then I went to Italy, with Mrs. Rowcroft, for a whole year. Papa was anxious for me to go, because he hoped I should forget you. I, too, was anxious to go, but not to forget you—oh, no, dearest—but to become more worthy of you, by learning music and painting in their own

native land. I worked very hard, for I trusted to win you back, and I knew how much you admired accomplished women. My masters praised me highly, and my heart was light. You spoke very coldly when you came back from Egremond Towers last Christmas, but I did not heed it much. I shall win you, I repeated to myself, for Edith had told me how Miss Dawson was to be married to Lord Killarney, and we never thought you cared for any one else. But at Lady Popworth's ball, when I had dressed my best, and every one flattered—"

"You looked lovely, darling."

"You were very reserved, and even avoided me, and I felt utterly wretched. But I did not get jealous of Lady Jessie Frescheville, though I grudged every word you gave her. However, there was still the concert at Newbury, and for the whole month I lived upon the hope, and I practised my music so carefully, but when the evening came, and I had exerted myself to the utmost, and longed greedily for one word from you, Walter, you looked on listlessly, while all

the assembly loudly applauded, and I was bitterly disappointed."

Avondale could only press her hand.

"I was mad for the time, and next day, when the horse ran off—"

"Oh, Florence, don't bring back that scene. Those few moments were intense agony. I was mad, too, and only prayed to die with you."

"When the horse ran off I felt no fear or regret, for I forgot papa. And you saved me, Walter, darling, though I had spoken so rudely to you just previously. I can't tell you how overpowering was my joy—I could not have told you then, I could only feel it. But next day you repulsed me when I thanked you, and said all, and more than all, that a woman could say. Papa, too, chanced to be in the next room, and heard our conversation, and he was very angry—and grieved as well, dear."

"I deserved his anger."

"He wished me to marry Sir Arthur Fernie. I put him off for the time. Then almost immediately my health got bad, and the doctor said I

must go to a warmer climate to escape the rest of the winter and the spring winds ; but I wished to die."

" Florence, love, don't speak thus," said Avondale, sobbing heavily.

She kissed him again, and continued—

" We went to Mentone and Nice, and on to Rome. Sir Arthur followed us and plied his suit ; but I would not give him an answer till the close of the year, and you know, dear, what the answer will be. Papa, however, was firm in not permitting me to discountenance his visits—and, indeed, poor fellow, he was very kind and attentive—and in not allowing me to contradict, even to my closest friends, the report of the marriage. Then Easter came, and we heard Mr. Maitland had resigned, but, a day or two later, that the Earl of Wigan, not the Marquis of Wharfedale, was the Premier. We were greatly surprised, for papa had read the debates, till a letter from Sir Charles Popworth said that the reason, so commonly reported, was a quarrel between you and the Marquis, and that you were seriously ill. My hope was utterly gone, till we

had another letter, saying that, after your life was despaired of, you were getting better, and that you were in Parliament. And Alice Popworth wrote to me to say how famous you were, and that she hoped I would alter my mind, and not marry Sir Arthur Fernie. So I knew that your closest friends did not imagine you were in love with any one; and hope came back, and I determined to think it was all a mistake."

"How good you have been, Florence, my love, my dearest."

"I got better and stronger—but I don't look quite so strong as I used; do I, Walter?"

"No, darling, and I have been the cause. Forgive me. But you are so beautiful!"

"I would return to England, and papa consented. We did not go to Brentwood, for I did not wish it. We were at Brighton, and then at Scarborough for a week; I was very unsettled, and papa humoured me. At last we came to Scotland. Papa guessed why I asked him, and hesitated; but I won him over, and we came to Stirling and the Highlands, and to Glenullyn. I wandered all about the hills, wherever Edith

told me you had been last year. I had treasured up her account, and I pictured your picnic on the island, and all the other scenes. I have, too, treasured up—though you don't deserve to hear it—all the notices of you in the papers, the opening of the town hall at Newbury, and what Sir Charles Popworth said—I was so sorry not to be there—your speech in the House, and so on. We staid near Glenullyn a fortnight, and came here three days ago. And, now, my Walter," dropping her voice even lower than the low tone in which she had been speaking, while a bright blush overspread her countenance, "won't you tell me again you love me, much more than you did last evening?"

CHAPTER XVI.

ONE of the passengers by the afternoon boat up the Lake, was the Earl of Wyversley. His face was pale, and showed traces of the grief that had been preying on him.

“Walter, don’t be annoyed at being burdened with a miserable fellow like myself. I have been brooding at Wyversley over—over—you know what; till I could stand it no longer, and, as you said you were going to stay here some days, I have run up in the hope of coming across you.”

“Very glad to see you. A run through Scotland must do you good; the scenery everywhere is grand.”

“It must be if its like what I saw coming up the loch. I hope I shan’t be in the way, as regards your sister, I mean.”

“Not a bit—especially now.”

“Especially now—why not? You have not left her anywhere?”

“No,” replied Avondale, smiling, “here she is, coming.”

He introduced Wyversley to Mr. and Miss Vrynné. The Earl was greatly perplexed, but a few words put matters clear.

“I sincerely congratulate you, Walter,” he said in doleful tones. “I thought you were looking very joyful. But, I fear, your happiness will only render me the more wretched.”

The same evening Avondale resolved, after much hesitation, to lay before Mr. Vrynné the whole history of his connection with Clare Campion. He considered himself as being under a moral obligation to do so. Mr. Vrynné had been as another father to him, and had overlooked and excused conduct which could not but have appeared to a stranger perfectly outrageous—the cause he was bound to explain. The explanation demanded all his nerve and courage. Mr. Vrynné heard him without interruption to the end.

“I am greatly obliged to you for this straightforward avowal, Walter. It has been a difficult task for you to make it, but you have only done

your duty to me. Your conduct last Christmas was simply incomprehensible, and I had, of course, intended to ask for an explanation at the first convenient moment, if you did not previously proffer one. As to yourself and Florence, I won't say more than that my sentiments and wishes have exactly coincided with those in your father's letter. I believed there was some secret lying beneath, but as you never said a word, I was constrained to think differently, and at last thought it best, for Florence's own sake, to break off the intercourse. I have ever looked upon you as thoroughly honourable and manly; otherwise I could not, yesterday, have allowed you to speak to Florence, unless you had first explained to me. I make no observation on what you have related to me, beyond saying that however much you have erred, I cannot deem that you have committed any sin. It is a sad story, a very sad story. You will never forget it. You are not guiltless of folly; a strict moralist might censure you more harshly. But I cannot do so, making allowance for headstrong emotions, and youthful impetuosity. Your remorse and illness

prove your contrition. You have won Florence —be true and faithful to her, be kind to her as I have been, love her as I do; and God bless you both.”

L'ENVOI.

THE whole party staid some days at Inversnaid. They ascended Ben Lomond, and admired the magnificent panorama that is unrolled around its base. They crossed over to Loch Katrine, and visited Helen's Isle and the Trossachs. Thence they returned and went along the West Coast to Skye. Then back to Oban, and up the Caledonian Canal, climbing Ben Nevis on the way. On to Inverness and Colloden, to Dunkeld and its Cathedral, to Killiecrankie and Perth. Mr. Avondale had overtaken them at Inverness, and Stuart Jardine meeting them at Perth compelled them to take up their abode at Glenullyn till his father, who was remaining in London a week longer, should come down.

Wyversley never referred, even when alone with Avondale, to Auricoma, but his thoughts were often with her. He had, however, got over

the sharpness of his grief, and Avondale trusted that with the progress of time, and by help of active occupation, he would remember her but as a dream.

Avondale, himself, had before him a new and undimmed future. His days were one continued round of happiness, genuine, unalloyed, intoxicating ; for

“ Love took up the glass of time, and turned it with his glowing hands ;

Every moment lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.”

THE END.

